Film Quarterly

Volume 53, Number 4, Summer 2000

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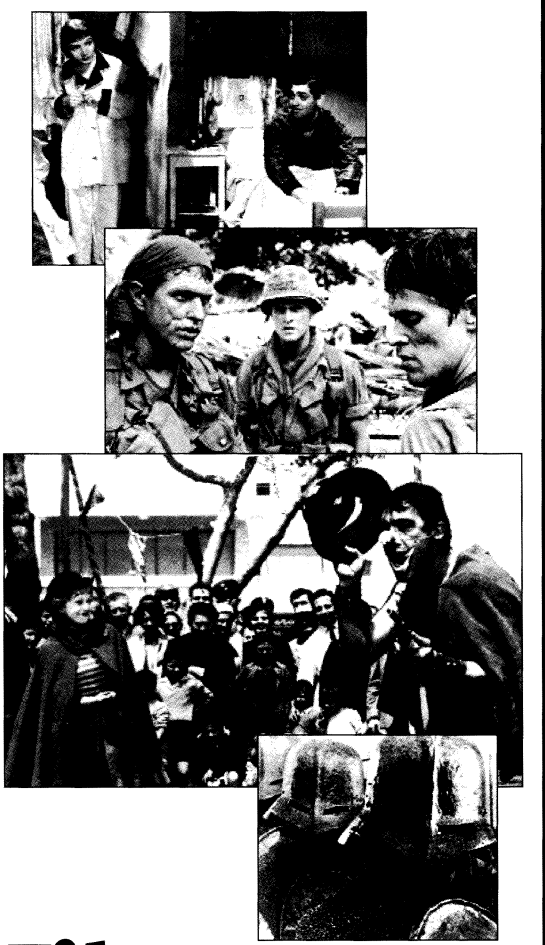

Film Studies at Emory University

EMORY UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL of ARTS & SCIENCES

Film Quarterly

Volume 53, Number 4, Summer 2000

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Ben Davis

Children of the Sixties

An Interview with the Owners of the Elgin

Revival movie houses were nonexistent in the Baltimore of the 40s and 50s when I was growing up. We could catch a revival once in awhile, usually when a movie theater had to fill slack time between bookings. Later, in the 70s, revivals were a bit more fashionable—the regional theater in Baltimore filled its house during the off-season in the summer with classics like *Gilda*; two movie buffs operated a local cinematheque on weekends on the Johns Hopkins University campus, showing everything from B movies like *Murder at the Vanities* to classics like *The Third Man*; and the nonprofit Film Forum ran thematic series in the summer at its home in the Baltimore Museum of Art.

When I came to New York in the late 80s, I discovered that what was exotic fare in Baltimore had been a staple in New York since the 1960s and even earlier. At its height in the 70s and early 80s, the revival house movement served up a banquet of theaters for New York film lovers to choose from: the Thalia, the New Yorker, the Regency, the Bleecker Street Cinema, Theatre 80 St. Marks, to mention just a few. Unfortunately, by the time of my arrival, the movement was at its nadir. Just a few years later, the last commercial revival house closed, leaving the nonprofit sector—the Film and Video Department at the Museum of Modern Art, the Walter Reade Theater of Lincoln Center, and the Film Forum—to keep the alternative screen alive.

I was curious about those commercial revival houses. They had been such an important part of the popular passion for film as an art form that had begun in the late 40s and early 50s with Italian neorealism and the French New Wave and reached its height in the 60s and 70s. These revival houses also helped reintroduce many vintage Hollywood films—*Sunset Boulevard* had not been shown for ten years in New York when it played at the New Yorker in 1960. And New York's revival houses became classrooms for the film-loving

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Far left: Steve Gould (left) and Chuck Zlatkin in front of what used to be the Elgin, now the Joyce Theater (© Lynn Padwe).

Left: The Elgin under renovation for its reincarnation as the Joyce Theater (© Cora Cahan).

Above: The old Elgin (© Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

public, including a number of future new wave American directors: Peter Bogdanovich worked the auteurist perspective into the programming at the New Yorker; Bob Rafelson, director of, among other films, *Five Easy Pieces,* hung out at the New Yorker and the Thalia before emigrating to Hollywood; and Woody Allen, who used these houses as settings in his films and stories, could often be found at the Thalia or the Regency.

Satisfying my own renewed enthusiasm for film, I completed a master's program in film studies at the College of Staten Island and wanted to continue independent work in the field. Studying the revival movement seemed like a worthy undertaking. Who were the owners and managers of the commercial revival houses? Why did they devote themselves to such a risky enterprise? What were their experiences operating their houses? What were they trying to accomplish?

And where to start my research, which I wanted to focus on the first-hand experiences of the people involved in these theaters? That question was soon answered for me serendipitously. One Saturday as I was walking on Sheridan Square in the Village with a friend, he briefly stopped to talk to a lanky, animated man; as we walked on, he casually mentioned that his friend was Steve Gould, who used to operate the Elgin, one of the better-known revival movie houses of the 70s.

I contacted Steve and his former partner in the Elgin, Chuck Zlatkin, and interviewed them four times.

It was more than 20 years ago, March 1977, when Steve and Chuck announced on the marquee of their Chelsea movie theater, "We have been evicted/Gone with the Wind/RIP." It was a trauma to the funky Chelsea neighborhood, which was then a low-rent area of, as one resident described it in a *Village Voice* article, "cheap restaurants, health food stores, bodegas, a confused personality, and a liberal amount of funk." The Elgin served as an anchor to the neighborhood. At the time of its closing, Vivian Gornick wrote a loving

tribute to the Elgin and its two managers in the *Village Voice,* describing what it meant to the elderly people in the neighborhood.

Steve Gould and Chuck Zlatkin were two young men who came to the Elgin with a youthful zest to experiment and express their values. And their values were those of the 60s—an openness to eccentric, independent films, a penchant for social causes, and a generous spirit that refused to exclude any person or group of people from their theater. So they instituted a senior citizen policy of 25 cents at all times, held special showings for various handicapped groups, and lent the theater for numerous causes.

The art deco theater originated as a conventional movie house in 1941, transformed into a Spanish-language movie house and theater in the 1950s, and once again changed form in the late 1960s, this time into the revival movie house and a counterculture mecca for film lovers of all stripes. The Elgin pioneered the midnight cult film, introducing John Waters' *Pink Flamingos* and Alexandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo;* and its "All-Night" screenings on Friday and Saturday nights became known as one of the most durable of the city's cultural celebrations.

The Elgin was also a mecca for the more traditional film buff. It ran the earliest retrospectives of the films of Buster Keaton and D.W. Griffith. Steve and Chuck organized festivals by star, decade, or director. They mounted the first Woody Allen festival and created French Tuesdays and Italian Wednesdays. They even catered to the limousine set with ballet films on Sunday mornings.

Like most revival houses of the period, the physical aspect of the theater was nondescript, but its funkiness and laissez-faire character matched the character of the neighborhood and the tolerant attitude of the two owners—the balcony often served as a gay cruising area, and marijuana was not a sometime occurrence. Vincent Canby, in a *New York Times* article of April 12, 1970, seemed to appreciate the "confident tackiness" of the theater's exterior and was amused by the lack of apostrophes in the titles on the marquee. But he gave high marks to the Elgin's interior, a "fine large space," and its auditorium, a "dull, quiet, forgotten sort of gray color," which was conducive to watching movies; and, most important, "the projection and sound are first-rate" and "the audience, mostly young, is respectful."

The Elgin had a devoted citywide audience. Even today the former owners will have people grab them when they learn they operated the Elgin and tell them what it meant to them to go there. "I got my film education at the Elgin," one woman told a reporter.

Steve and Chuck had no special background in film before their careers at the Elgin. Steve, an inveterate New Yorker, who delighted me with his youthful experiences in New York and on Broadway and the Runyonesque characters he met there, came to the theater through a circuitous route that began in his native Brooklyn and Queens, then meandered north to Syracuse University for his bachelor degree, and veered back to New York City and New York University for a master's degree in arts management. His NYU internship in managing a theater on Broadway eventually led to an introduction to a movie house entrepreneur, Ben Barenholtz, who hired him as manager first of an East Village movie house and then of the Elgin in 1970 or 71, where he "started working with my once and future partner, Chuck Zlatkin."

Chuck, who was born in the Bronx, dropped out of City College "because it was the 60s," married, and lived with his wife for a while in Woodstock. Returning to New York City, he became active in the antiwar movement, organizing at the grassroots level and participating in demonstrations in the Northeast. Trying to earn a living, he "tried some things in radio in New Jersey, documentary stuff that didn't fly." A colleague told him of the Elgin, which was hiring. "I got a job as an usher at the Elgin, at $1.85 an hour. That was my big break in the movies."

They ran the Elgin for only seven years. It closed for complex reasons, including the advent of VCRs, the changing audience, and greedy distributors, who anted up the rentals on films the Elgin had popularized. Today the Elgin has become the Joyce Theater, a theater devoted to dance. Chuck is no longer connected to film, while Steve is a freelance publicity and marketing agent for movie theaters and distributors. Both still live in the same places they lived in when the Elgin closed—Steve and his wife on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village and Chuck and his family in Chelsea near the Elgin. And both recall the Elgin days with enthusiasm, affection—and a deep regret that they could not have saved it.

BEN DAVIS: *What kind of theater was the Elgin before it became a revival house?*

STEVE: It was one of the last theaters built in New York City before the moratorium came in World War II. And it had a similar-looking sister theater further up 8th Avenue. Both were operated by Azteca Films, a Mexican-based company, and showed Spanish language films, because that was a heavily Hispanic area.

CHUCK: That was where the stage [in the Elgin] came from. I hope I'm accurate because this was before I

King of Hearts

worked there. And then Barenholtz changed it. But I think the first thing that made that transition from the old Spanish theater to what it evolved into was the showing of Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*. That was before my time.

STEVE: Ben had a good eye. When the Elgin started, he would show major studio movies as well as esoteric or unusual ones. All of those wonderful films that were kind of laying fallow in the fields of cinema.

CHUCK: I went to work there just as it started. I remember they had some press showing, with about 20 people invited, and I said, "This is crazy, this is fabulous stuff that we're doing here." That's when I started doing the media work and the press, before I got into programming or management. I basically worked my way up, from a lowly usher to a guy who was there for the end.

Why did you two take over the theater?

STEVE: We showed a movie that United Artists had, called *King of Hearts,* Philippe de Broca's film with Alan Bates; and it developed a very unusual following, because you had people who liked foreign films, and people who liked Alan Bates as an actor, and people who thought this was very, very trippy—just a broad spectrum. We were able to show it because United Artists basically lost the rights to distribute it in the U.S. The person who picked up the U.S. rights wanted to subdistribute it to the Northeast. [*King of Hearts* was already showing in revival houses in other cities.] He made phone calls to Ben, Chuck, and me, and it started Ben thinking; he really loved that idea. So he got into distribution through that.

And left the Elgin?

STEVE: Well, he didn't really leave the Elgin. He made Chuck and me an offer we couldn't refuse, in terms of becoming partners with him in the Elgin.

What was the offer?

STEVE: A new corporation was set up and we were the three principals. He still owned the building, but as far as the operating company, it was then Chuck and myself. But I think he realized that since we had a vested interest in the place, we would care for it, which I think we did. If either Chuck or I were independently wealthy, we would have probably been able to take care of it more. We did as much as we could technologically for the time. It did have, outside of the Ziegfeld, the largest screen in Manhattan. It was over 40 feet wide and 20 feet high.

CHUCK: Someone threw eggs at the screen, and we had to get a new one—eggs are the worse thing. Somewhere we got a CinemaScope screen, and, of course, we did a film festival in CinemaScope to open it up, and turned a negative into a positive.

STEVE: This was a commercial venture. We had to grovel and grunt. But we had step-downs, so instead of showing silent movies at 24 frames a second, we had step-down motors so they would go back to 18 frames

a second, and look like the normal speed of a silent film—all this crazy stuff. We put in top-of-the-line speakers for the time. This was a lot—just before the advent of all of this hotsy-totsy Dolby digital and stuff like that. But for what we were able to do financially, people got the best presentation.

Ben worked with us, but basically Chuck and I tried to develop and broaden the base that we had. Chuck was a terrific publicist, and I did movie selections, initially working with Ben and then basically on our own.

How did you decide on this division of labor?
STEVE: What happened was Ben found out that I liked to "hondle," a Yiddish term for bargaining. Ben was kind of a reserved individual, so I wound up as the one who tried to beat the shit out of the theater distributors and the people that had the movies, to get the best deal possible. We did get good deals at that time, because some of the people didn't know what they had. There were many, many times that a movie played at the Elgin, and it was because of that that major studios or the person who owned the film got a new lease on life for the film.
CHUCK: I guess my contributions to the theater had to do with getting it more known, through my more aggressive approach to publicizing, that it was really a tremendous institution. And also connecting a lot of the political activities and movements of the time to the theater, and getting more involved in—as Steve felt, too—community activity.

That was quite a risky undertaking for the two of you. Why would you have wanted to do it?
CHUCK: I connected with the Elgin at a time that was right for the theater and for me. It gave me a lot of chances for expression of my views and interests. We got to indulge ourselves a lot of times by showing films that we believed in. Our last U.S. premiere, before we closed, was *Union Maids,* a documentary on the Rosie Riveters of World War II. It was nominated that year for an Academy Award as best documentary. So we went out with a bang. I wish I had a copy of the final press release that we did. It really expressed a lot, because a lot of independent filmmakers couldn't get a chance to show their films in a commercial venue, and we worked with them. We gave second chances to filmmakers. We showed a lot of stuff in the midnight format.

What was your first midnight show?
CHUCK: *El Topo* [Alexandro Jodorowsky, 1970, Mexico] was the first continuous successful one that we had. That ran for six months, seven nights a week. And we really don't know how long it would have run, except when John [Lennon] and Yoko [Ono] came to see it, they decided they wanted to buy it. They purchased the film and opened it up on Broadway, at a regular movie house, but it was not the way to handle something like that. But that was quite an experience.

How did you get El Topo*?*
CHUCK: Allen Douglas worked out an arrangement with Ben at the time. We had an underground opening, an invitational opening at midnight, and it was like the entire 60s was invited to be there—they came. That was an extraordinary night. The way we showed the film was pretty innovative, because we didn't have a separate admissions policy for it, it was there to be discovered. So you came to see the regular double bill and you could just stay over. And it really worked, the whole way of showing it. The time was right. And a number of other films got discovered that way.

Such as?
CHUCK: *Pink Flamingos* [John Waters, 1972, US]. That ran for quite some time there, the same way.
STEVE: When Bob Shaye of New Line was starting out, he approached Ben and Chuck and me and said, "What do you think of this? We got this cockamamie film, it's a guy in drag and at the end he eats poodle shit." And we kind of stared at each other wide-eyed.
CHUCK: Bob Shaye sent over the print for us to look at because he didn't know what to do with it, and no one else was around, and he handed me this print, 16 mm, and I sat in the office not knowing anything about what I was about to see, who John Waters was, and then I sat down and watched this. And my reaction was, I don't know what I just saw, but it's definitely the midnight show. So the first time we showed *Pink Flamingos* was a trial. It was a Tuesday night in February, and it was about six degrees out, and we had like 200 people show up.

How did they know about it?
CHUCK: Waters' connection. People had heard of it, knew about it. So obviously, that was something we were going to show. We didn't say, "Oh, this is definitely going to make it." If we did, we wouldn't have tried it out on a Tuesday night, at six degrees.
STEVE: It played midnights at the Elgin for at least two years. John Waters never forgot that. He's a very honorable man—and always fun, because he'd bring that tribe down. Edie the Egg Lady showed up all the time. The best was when Divine was throwing dead mackerel from his brassiere.
CHUCK: Between his legs.

Left: *Union Maids*
Below: *Pink Flamingos*

STEVE: And then poppers from his brassiere. And that was the worst. Because when the amyl nitrate was caught on the floor, people stepped on it. And the smell was just like old socks. And scrubbing the floor. That was pretty rank.

The audience must have loved it.

STEVE: They did. This whole concept of *The Rocky Horror Show* starting it all was bullshit. It didn't start it all, it was there . . . and probably somewhere and someplace, it happened before us, but I don't know

about it. Later, instead of just midnight shows, we started doing all-night shows. We would have four movies for the price of one. You would go in at midnight, and you wouldn't come out until 6:30 or 7 in the morning.

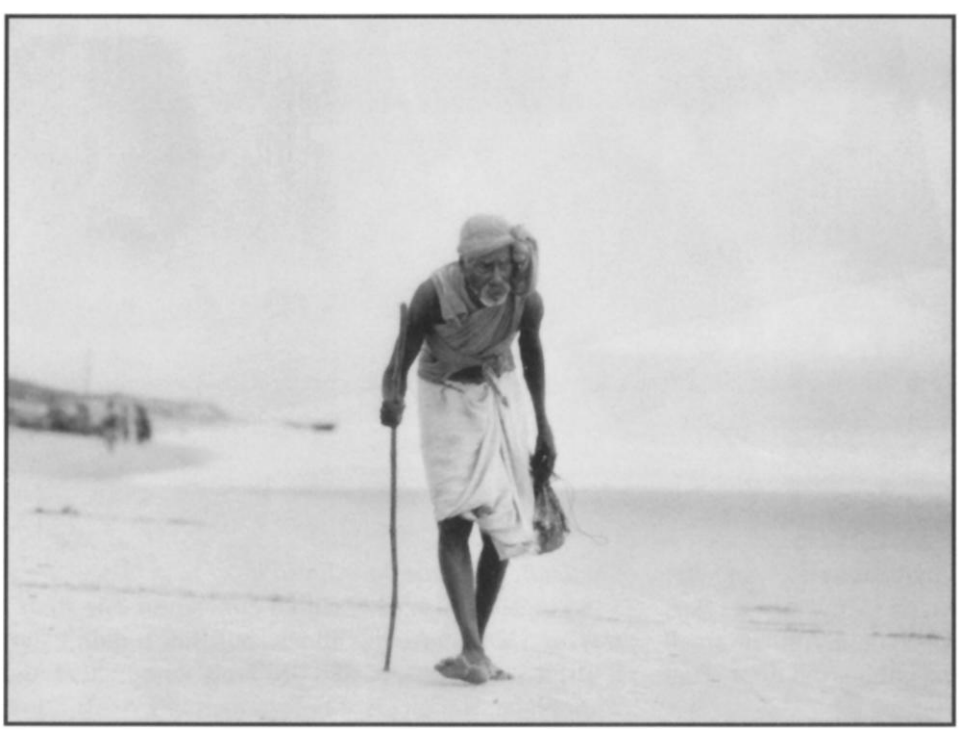
You always wanted to push the envelope with something exciting for people to do. It started actually with a film from New Yorker Films, I believe, called *Phantom India,* which was a six-hour movie. We had a good turnout for that, and we said, "Oh, people were willing to stay six hours." So we showed four Marx Brothers movies altogether. It became old home week, with almost 600 regulars. We would sell sandwiches with bean sprouts and everything on it at the candy stand. Of course, people had been maybe having some drinks or a smoke before they went in, so their appetites were a little more voracious—you'd have people spending maybe $10 or $12 at a candy stand. Nowadays, it's easy, because you spend $6 for a box of popcorn.

CHUCK: The first time we had an all-night show, we had felt maybe this would work, maybe it wouldn't. Now it seems old hat, but at the time it seemed risky. Hundreds and hundreds, maybe a thousand people, more people than we could fit in the theater, came. We just had to close the theater, and there were a lot of unhappy people outside, because you couldn't get another chance that night to see it. So a short time later, I got a call from the police: They're coming over, there was a bomb threat. Now maybe we squeezed 600 people into the theater, we're supposed to have about 520, and there must have been maybe a couple hundred people still outside milling around. So the cops came and spoke to me and said, "We're going to evacuate the theater." And I'm thinking to myself, it's going to be total chaos. There'd be no way to separate the hundreds who were out there from the people inside. And I just thought it was some disgruntled fan, so I said, "Is there any way I could take responsibility for this?" I would not do this today, it's a different time. And they agreed. We went through the night holding our breath, but there was no incident .

You took quite a chance.

CHUCK: Yeah. There was another time when we were showing *Executive Action.* It was the first commercial film about the Kennedy assassination, with Burt Lancaster, Robert Ryan, Will Geer. We were also showing the Zapruder film, the guy who had taken pictures of the actual assassination. We couldn't advertise it, because I think *Time* magazine still owned the rights. Well, just before we were about to show it, we got a bomb threat; and at that time, there was no hesitating—let's clear the theater. In other words, I thought, This is a little more controversial. Maybe the Marx Brothers didn't have that many enemies. We made these judgment calls. Negotiating on the spot.

One time I lost in negotiating. We were showing *Fantasia* and some Disney shorts as our regular show. And we had as our midnight show, *Fritz the Cat.* Ads



Phantom India

arrive, everything's booked, ready to go, and all of a sudden we get lawyers showing up from Disney, they don't want their films being shown on the same bill in the same theater as *Fritz the Cat*. X-rated animation. Bad stuff. We negotiated, they're gonna pull their stuff if we show it. We were caught in a bind. We had the Disney scheduled for a number of days, and *Fritz the Cat* was one night only. Disney won. On that one, Disney won.

Were there other innovations in programming that you tried?

STEVE: At a later time, we decided that since there were enough people of different ethnicities in New York, we would have on Tuesday, French films; on Wednesday, Italian films; on Thursday, Japanese films. And people would know that if they wanted to catch a Japanese flick, well, let's go to the Elgin on Thursday.

One of the other things we started was on Sunday mornings. We had a ballet series, which we called the Sunday Brunch series, and we showed some of the forgotten ballet films with Margot Fonteyn and all of these famous Russian ballerinas. People would show up, and they would get for their $2.50 not only the movie but free coffee and donuts.

CHUCK: The first time we showed *An Evening with the Royal Ballet,* limousines pulled up with women in mink coats. That's the movie that has the encore, so the audience applauds at the end and then the dancers come back on and dance again, and the audience went crazy, a standing ovation, on Sunday morning.

Limousines and ladies in mink sound like a Lincoln Center audience, not a revival house one.

CHUCK: Maybe there were about 15 different core audiences. You'd have rock stars showing up in limos on Saturday midnight to see what was going on, and maybe have some limo showing up on Tuesday evening for French Tuesday. Then the midnight shows, then the regular double features that we got together. So there were people who related to the Elgin specifically for one thing or another. And you would look at those people, like the women with the minks coming in to see *An Evening with the Royal Ballet,* at 10 o'clock in the morning. And just a few hours before, people had exited from some all-night manic-depression festival, spaced out of their minds. And to each of them the Elgin was the theater for that. Rarely did those audiences mix.

Even in the same series you'd have different audiences. You would have three audiences attending the Samurai series. You would have martial arts locos, and they were a very strange group to begin with, because many of them were involved with various art forms of killing, that mentality. Then you would have the filmgoer who was serious about all kinds of film and wanted to see this genre. And then you would have Japanese who would come to see Japanese films.

If we had a core audience, it was people who were serious about film—film students, people into film as an art form—it was an important part of their life, and they would come to see everything. And it really broadened their experience. They happened to like one thing or another, and they'd come and just happen on other things and they'd discover it and not even know about it.

STEVE: There were some eccentrics.

CHUCK: The Piss Man. A senior citizen. He had a problem with his . . .

STEVE: He was incontinent.

CHUCK: People would complain there was some guy next to them who reeked of urine. He was like a regular guy. We felt bad 'cause we had to tell him he can't come here anymore. We drew straws and flipped a coin and I lost, so I had to go up to him and tell him.

STEVE: Tell him what he said.

CHUCK: He said, "I'm surprised it took you so long." This guy had been thrown out of every place in the world, like right away. He'd been coming to the Elgin for weeks.

STEVE: There was a period of four hours to clean between the last all-night show on Saturday and the first ballet film on Sunday morning. So we had some youngsters who would come to the all-night shows and who are probably wearing glasses now, thanks to seeing too many movies. A couple of times they said, "Well I don't have money to stay and see *The Lovers of Teruel,*" or whatever the hell we were playing—Plisetskaya dances or something like that—"If I help you clean, could I stay and see it." So we put them to work.

We had regulars. We had a young fella who, I guess nowadays you'd have to say would be developmentally challenged. His mother called up and said, "You're always so good to my son. I'm letting him come to the theater today because he loves the Marx Brothers. Can you make certain that Joey (I don't remember the fella's real name) gets in all right, and he gets back to the subway?" We had times where my partner's wife would baby-sit a kid because the young parents wanted to see this movie and the kid got a little unruly. We were downstairs, I was working on the programming, she was working on the books, Chuck was working on getting the press release out, the kid stayed with us.

It was a theater which was pretty loose in its restrictions. It was a theater where the gay community would not have any problems with cruising; we didn't

bother them, it was live and let live. There were times when I would offer the theater on a cost basis to the local school, IS 70, so that they would be able to see some films. We wanted to turn the kids on to film so they would become our customers, too.

You also instituted something totally unbusinesslike—the senior citizen policy.

CHUCK: Initially, we had a senior citizens policy—during the afternoon you could get in for 75 cents—and I was saying to Steve one day, "You know, these people come mostly in the afternoon, why limit it just to the afternoon. Why not let them come to a midnight show? What's 75 cents? Why not let them in for a quarter, any time?" So we had a press release and sent it out. And we got tremendous coverage. Television crews came down for the whole thing. And basically, the old people still came the same time. On the year's anniversary, we decided to do some kind of a celebration and have coffee and cake, celebrating one year of this 25-cent policy. And we went back to see which films had the highest senior citizen attendance. It was *Ulysses* and *Tropic of Cancer.*

STEVE: You never know that something that you do can mean so much to another person. We had a retired man who did lithographs, he gave us lithographs around the holidays. I remember this guy that lived in an SRO [single room occupancy]—and they don't even have them anymore in Chelsea—he used to smoke the cheapest, stinkiest cigars I can ever remember, and he had bad legs, and he'd shuffle; the guy was probably about 70 years old, and it didn't matter what we were showing. And I'd say, "You really want to come in today?" And it might be on a day when I'd have a real narrative-driven Italian film, let's say, and I remember him walking out one time and smoking his stogie, and he says, "You know, when I first started coming here, I was really pissed off with you kids for showing those movies with writing on the bottom, but you know something, they ain't bad."

Well, of course, a lot of the major studios went ballistic when we set up the senior citizen policy. They said, "What are you doing? You're giving it away."

We did it because we wanted to. But ultimately it was terrific for us for public relations purposes. The local bakery would bring in this giant sheet cake every year when we had the anniversary party in the basement in the lounge of the Elgin. And the guy across the street, the bar, supplied sodas.

You had good relations with the neighborhood.

CHUCK: It was a lot of fun. Every Thanksgiving my wife and I would have an all-day Thanksgiving dinner for the people who lived close to the theater. Elgin softball team played against other theaters, played against the 10th precinct, the longhairs against the cops. It was quite an experience.

There were other revival movie theaters besides yours in the city at the time. How were you different?

CHUCK: I think we did crazier things. I remember sitting in the manager's office with Divine, she had come for some anniversary there of *Pink Flamingos,* and he and she, she and he, or shim as he referred to himself, sitting there not in makeup, talking business with me. How he had done this, done that, whatever. Ultra Violet and a bunch of Warhol people came that night, as well as some of the regular crowd. Somehow to me that separates us from the New Yorker and the Thalia and even Theater 80. The whole thing of the *Pink Flamingos* audience leaving and people coming in to see *An Evening with the Royal Ballet* the next morning, that separated us. The fact that we wanted to make film accessible to everybody to whom film was important. I don't think you could say the Elgin was elitist or snobby. Some of the patrons of the other revival houses looked down on some of the things we tried as not really serious. How could you show *Blood Feast* or some of the George Romeros? Romero must have talked at the theater one night. Some of that stuff was not in the realm of what a serious repertory theater should be about.

It was an eclectic selection.

Steve: Yeah. So to have people immersed in something—and also to help us find a niche—we decided to direct people's attention to a particular filmmaker, a particular country, or a particular time period. And that's how a lot of the programming was done. Many people might have seen or heard of *Birth of a Nation;* but many of Griffith's films, like *Broken Blossoms* or *Orphans of the Storm,* had not really been seen on a big screen commercially in a long time. Maybe at a fine arts museum and places like that, they would show them; but for somebody to put their ass on the line and say, "Okay, we'll do this, and we'll do this at our theater," that was a bit of a gamble.

Many people might have seen as a filler a short subject of W.C. Fields, but they didn't see all of his films. And it was before videocassette, and if you weren't near a museum or a member of a museum or in college where they would have a college film society's access to these films, you might not have seen them all. So, like with the silent movies of Griffith's, we had a piano player come in and play an original score for us. So those were the kind of things that we would do.

Birth of a Nation

CHUCK: I remember with our D.W. Griffith film festival, of course, we showed *Birth of a Nation*. And the next thing you know there's a demonstration in front of the theater. Showing this racist film. We had to negotiate with the demonstrators, explain who we were, what our credentials were, what the rationale was behind it. And then I asked them—it was maybe 15, 20, it wasn't hundreds of people—if any of them had ever seen this film that they were demonstrating against. And of course none of them had. I said, "I'll make you a deal. If you promise to behave yourselves during the showing, I'll let you in for free. And then you tell me afterwards, do you think there's any value in our showing this film."

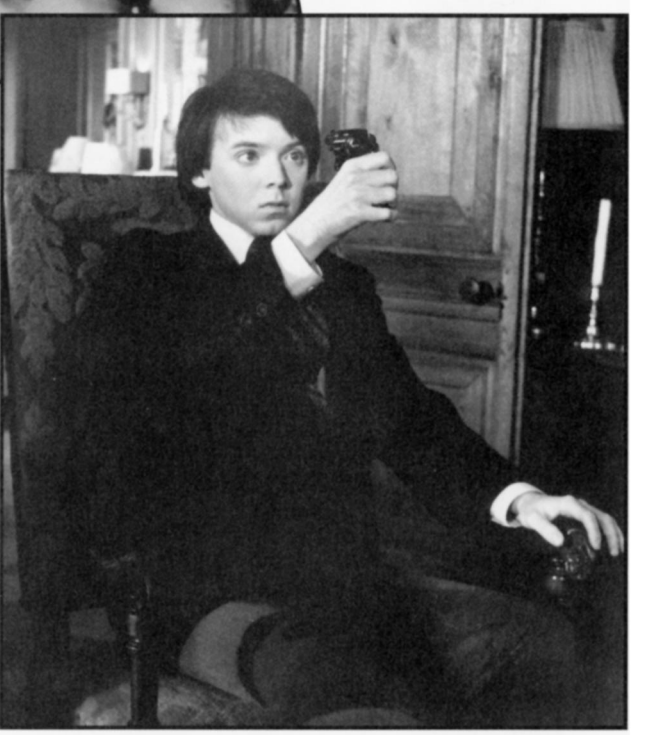
And it worked. Sure enough, afterwards, they came out, and we discussed it. At that point they had called some other people and found out the radical credentials that we had and went away. That was it.

How did you select what films to show?
STEVE: A lot of the films came from suggestions that were offered to us by patrons—and through us hunting movies out. I think we were the only theater, maybe in the country, that ever showed George Lucas's first film, *THX 1138,* after it played first-run and died. But we played that with a movie called *Billy Jack* [Tom Laughlin, 1971, US], which was not well reviewed, but which people tried to follow. We played Martin Scorsese's film, W*ho's That Knocking at My Door*. We just would root around.

Where would you root?
Steve: Well, we'd hear word-of-mouth. We had, as a matter of fact, the first film that Tommy Lee Jones ever made. It was produced in Canada, called *Eliza's Horoscope*. It was a lovely little film, he did a good job in it, but it was his first film. We heard about it through somebody who sent me the *Toronto Star*. I saw an article in it on the film, and we called the woman who directed it and the guy who produced it. They came down here, and we showed it.

Do you have other examples?
STEVE: There was a film, I think it was made in the 60s or earlier, called *The Saragossa Manuscript* [Wojciech Has, 1964, Poland], which had a real cult following. And we were able to track that down and the ownership rights. It was owned by a butcher in Chicago, who only had a couple of copies of it printwise.
CHUCK: We started showing a lot of the old rock films, not knowing if that stuff was going to work. And that drew people. So we would put together like about three of those films in a package—Woodstock, Monterey Pop, whatever—and you would walk into the theater, and it was like Woodstock reincarnated there. To those kids that came to that, that was all that the theater was

Left: *The Saragossa Manuscript*
Below: *Harold and Maude*



to them. It was thick in there, smoke was thick. You had people doing all kinds of things, selling wares in back of the theater that we didn't know about.

Wares?

CHUCK: There was one guy I met years later, he said, "Oh, yeah, my friend put himself through school selling drugs during the all-night show back of the theater."

You said you revived studio films that were just lying around and gave them new life.

STEVE: There's a film that I think is still the favorite college student film, but as a videocassette now—Ruth Gordon and Bud Cort in *Harold and Maude* [Hal Ashby, 1971, US]. That died at the box office. We had seen it, we said, "It's not that bad, it's kind of strange. Probably something that our audience would really like." So we teamed that up with *King of Hearts*, another offbeat movie, or *Brewster McCloud* [Robert Altman, 1970, US]. And these movies just didn't really cut it commercially because the studios at that time never had a specialty division. They were like a supermarket that didn't realize that some of their customers in their butcher shop really wanted a standing rib roast or a crown roast or osso buco. All they had there was chopped meat and pork chops. So we were able to go in and say to the studios, "You see that, those old things over there?" and they said, "What, those knuckles?" "Yeah, throw them in a bag, we'll take them, we can do something with them." You know, we can sell them as osso buco.

There was, I think, a little bit of an antagonism on the part of—maybe I'm making more out of us than there was—the savvy distributor, who saw some of the grosses and, if they went by, could see the lines—some of them themselves came to the theater to see the movies. They'd think, "Holy shit, our branch office sold these films to him flat for x number of dollars, holy shit." So all of a sudden a movie that they were ready to throw out with the bath water became a cause célèbre.

So it was films like Harold and Maude *and . . .*

STEVE: And the Mick Jagger film, *Performance* [Nicolas Roeg/Donald Cammell, 1970, GB], those kinds of

Above: *Performance*
Left: *Brewster McCloud*

movies. Then after a while, when you called back up, instead of getting that deal that you had, they said, "Oh, no, I'm sorry, that's a special arrangement, you're going to have to pay this minimum plus a percentage and stuff." And it's like, Hey, nobody told us that we were the test marketing group for Hollywood. We would get really pissed off about that.

The film companies took advantage of you.

STEVE: Yeah, but it was more than that. Those companies that did not mine that streak of gold would just use the shit out of it and then close out the mine. We had a print of *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* [Robert Altman, 1971, US]. It was not unplayable, but it did have some problems printwise. We had tried to get a new print. And I guess because [Warren] Beatty was in it, we'd have people showing up at the box office who would be considered celebrities but who never were so rude as to say, "I'm the star, I want red carpet treatment." They all joined the line. Lauren Hutton came in one afternoon to see the film, and she said, "Oh, this film is very, very scratchy." "Well, I'm sorry, Miss Hutton, but we have a sign up." We used to post a sign that said something like "Reel five has scratches." And I said, "I'm really sorry, we played this before, and we didn't want to play it again, but they can't find another

print." And she says, "Let me make a phone call." And we wound up, the next time we played it, with a new print.

That's the other thing, Chuck and I, we weren't part of the inside track, the elite of the city. And for that reason, we operated by our bootstraps.

CHUCK: We would get films going and then price ourselves out of even getting it after that because film companies would see the potential for it. They came out with *Holy Mountain*, sequel to *El Topo*. We weren't even in the running to get that, it opened here at the Waverly, big money, none of our policy of letting people stay over.

But your way worked for other films you showed.

Steve: Yeah. There was one time when we were showing four movies and by midnight we had sold out. But a lot of people were just coming to see *The Harder They Come* at midnight and then leaving. So I said to the people that were waiting in line—to the tune of maybe 150, 200 people, which could be a little white-knuckle if it would get ugly—"You know the old story, I have some good news and bad news," and I told them, "The bad news is that we are sold out,"—that heart-in-the-throat routine when you see people moving toward you—"but I have some very good news, that there will be seats available after *The Harder They Come*, to the tune of probably about 200 people, so if you bear with us and we find out how many seats are available, we will reshow *The Harder They Come* at 6 a.m., so you'll see all movies."

The Harder They Come.

I understand that Woody Allen and other film people would see movies there.

CHUCK: Woody Allen was a good friend to the theater. Any of the old comics, comedians, he would be there to see them. Buster Keaton, Fields, anything we showed, he would be there. I remember once he was seeing Chaplin. He leaves the theater, he walks south on 8th Avenue to 18th Street, crosses 8th Avenue to the east side, walks north back up to 19th Street, walks across the street and waits there, and then a burgundy Rolls Royce comes to pick him up. It was like, he didn't want to be noticed, then why do you get in a car like that.

STEVE: We were doing the first retrospective of Woody Allen's films that I think appeared in New York or anywhere else, and to make it complete I had to get *What's New, Pussycat?* Supposedly it was taken out of service by United Artists. Why, I don't know. Since Woody used to come to the Elgin himself, I called up his producers Rollins and Joffe and I spoke to Rollins, and he said, "Well, I'll see what I can do." So the next day, I get a call from my cashier because I was on duty, "David Picker's on the phone." David Picker at that time was president of United Artists. I said, "Get the fuck out of here. What are you talking about, David Picker's on the phone." So, he said, "No, no, no, the man's name is David Picker from United Artists." I says, "All right." So I went downstairs, took the phone, he says, "This is Dave Picker here." I said, "Yes sir, can I help you?" I figured, hell, Christ, this is a lawsuit coming or something happening here. He says, "Jesus Christ, did you have to get Woody Allen on us to get this print of *What's New, Pussycat?*" He says, "You've got it, but please, don't shake the trees like that. If you've got a problem, call my office first."

I read an article where an owner of a revival movie house blamed the distributors for the demise of his house and other houses because they became too greedy.

STEVE: Well, I think that might be a simplistic view. You have to look at the big picture. Before this real estate development craze, people who owned the real estate that theaters were on, would think, "It's a big building, what the hell, we can't tear it down, we can't do this, we're getting steady bucks for rent. All right, fine, let the crazy bastards do their cockamamie movies." You had people that were investigating the new technologies, like video. That was on the doorstep. Cable was coming in. At that time, we had already realized problems were setting in.

What's New, Pussycat?

What kind of problems?
STEVE: Getting films from distributors, trying to track the market because it was segmenting a little more than it had in the past. There were films that should have filled in the gap of films that we no longer showed because they were no longer profitable; but they weren't available to us because of contractual obligations. Everything got very complicated. There were things happening by '78 with cable television, the advent of Betamax, VHS was on the horizon. And it was somewhat of a downward spiral in general with motion picture exhibition.

So you were finally forced to close.
STEVE: It was very sad because there were young kids that would come to the theater, Chuck lived up there at that time, they'd come to the theater and they'd look, and it was an empty shell. It's as if a part of me died when the Elgin died. I have wonderful memories, but there's something, as I said before, about a darkened auditorium. The Elgin was an anchor in Chelsea. And to have that empty and rats running in it and stuff like that was a horrible curse to put on the community.
CHUCK: I work with a guy in the post office, and it came up in conversation that I ran the Elgin, and he just said, "Elgin! I gotta tell my friends." He's 48 and all of a sudden he's 22 again. Asked me questions, how much he loved that place. And that happens occasionally, how much it meant to people. And that's what it was about. If we had had a different attitude, maybe we would have survived, but maybe it wouldn't have meant as much to people. 'Cause we were so open. We were passionate about it, we got involved, we registered voters there, we had benefits, farm workers, every kind of group. When the Panther 21 was on trial, a part of their indictment was that they had seen *The Battle of Algiers* [Gillo Pontecorvo, 1965, Alg/It] at the Elgin.
STEVE: I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I must say that there were very, very hard times. And Chuck and I had one or two yelling matches. But as Chuck said to me on the subway ride up to the lawyer's office one time, "Well, if we can stay friends and get through this, we'll know we did something right." And to this day, we're friends, we see each other, families, and share good times, and if anything came out of this, it was knowing that I had a partner like Chuck.

Ben Davis is a freelance writer in New York City. His article "Beginnings of the Film Society Movement in the United States" appeared in *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*.

These exchanges are a synthesis of four interviews that took place between September and November of 1996: two interviews with Steve on September 22 and October 3; an interview with Chuck on October 14; and a joint interview with the two on November 17.

Matthew Bernstein

Perfecting the New Gangster

Writing *Bonnie and Clyde*

The intimate connections between 1960s films from Hollywood and Europe continue to fascinate film historians and buffs. At a time when innovative European directors were redefining the possibilities of narrative filmmaking—when they weren't imported to Hollywood to do their thing in English—Hollywood was gradually turning from behemoth, blockbuster productions to innovative "smaller" films like *The Graduate* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969) that appealed to younger moviegoers. The possibilities of the New Hollywood seemed limitless.

Yet, in retrospect, a number of critics have argued that American commercial directors would and could go only so far in emulating the foreign art cinema that intrigued intellectuals and college students of the 60s and 70s.[2] And within the broader issue of how Hollywood filmmaking tames the stylization of foreign cinemas, *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) holds a special pride

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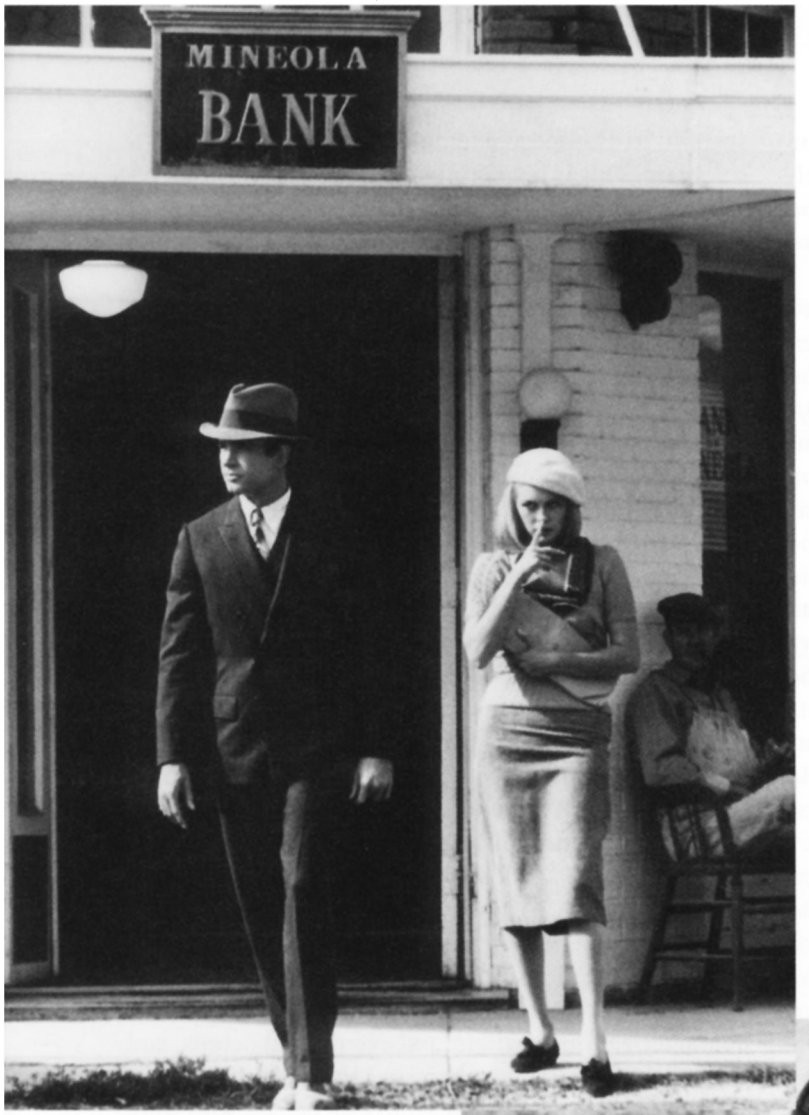


So it was not exactly a *Nouvelle Vague* as if the water were just flowing on to these shores. There was a riptide, too, going in the other direction.

—Arthur Penn[1]

Above and left: Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty—"We rob banks"—as Bonnie and Clyde

Right: Slow-motion massacre

of place. More than any other American film of the 1960s, it brought the French New Wave's free-wheeling riffs on the gangster film back home to Hollywood in order to reexamine the genre's implications for contemporary American society.

For all the scholarly and critical attention focused on *Bonnie and Clyde*, relatively little has been written on how the film's script evolved and the place of the French New Wave influence in this process. [3] Certainly, the film owes much to American film genre conventions. Like Eddie and Joan in Fritz Lang's pre-war *You Only Live Once* (1937), Bowie and Keechie in Nicholas Ray's *They Live By Night* (1948), and Bart and Annie in Joseph E. Lewis's *Gun Crazy* (1949), Bonnie and Clyde struggle to survive and are overwhelmed by fate and the dictates of the genre that punishes transgressors and sacrifices them to maintain social order. In fact, the writing and production of *Bonnie and Clyde* suggests the affinities of Hollywood's postwar filmmaking—particularly the film noir and the rural gangster couple (or bandit) subgenre—with the phenomenological aesthetic and existential ethos of the French New Wave.

Neophyte screenwriters David Newman and Robert Benton were both editors at *Esquire* when they wrote their treatment in the early 1960s. They and director Arthur Penn all greatly admired the French New Wave. In fact, François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were themselves each phone calls away from directing *Bonnie and Clyde*.[4] Yet a close look at the film's early 1964 treatment and various script drafts—from the October 1965 first draft to the September 1966 final (itself revised through December during shooting)—reveals that the film's earliest incarnations were even closer in spirit to its European exemplars than the film we now celebrate. This is not surprising, if we consider that revising a script usually results in greater "coherence" or conventionality, even if the screenplay in question was written and revised outside of Hollywood.

But it *is* surprising to discover that the screenwriters' spiritual and stylistic mentor, François Truffaut, encouraged the movement toward conventional Hollywood dramaturgy, while director Arthur Penn nudged the film closer to the French New Wave aesthetic. The "riptide" Arthur Penn alludes to above, during a discussion of *Mickey One* (1964), affected *Bonnie and Clyde* as well.

With the input of Truffaut and Penn, Newman and Benton had an interestingly unconventional script when principal photography began in Midlothian, Texas, in fall 1966. By examining the scriptwriting process behind this American classic, we see how an innovative film whose original concept, storyline, narrative structure, and characters' psychology were all inspired by the French New Wave ultimately became a New Hollywood film, and how the sensibility and aesthetics of the two were so closely intertwined.

It's worth noting, to begin with, that Newman and Benton's early versions of Bonnie and Clyde's story envisioned a striking number of the finished film's characterizations, actions, and even visual details, and did so with astounding precision.[5] For example, the notion that Bonnie and Clyde were folk heroes who were rebelling with mid-60s panache against a repressive society appears in Newman and Benton's very first treatment, as an expression of what the writers identified in

Figure 1. "Funny and horrible at the same time"

Figure 2. The Parker family reunion

the pages of *Esquire* as "the new sentimentality."[6] "If Bonnie and Clyde were here today," they wrote,

> they would be hip. Their values have become assimilated in much of our culture—not robbing banks and killing people, of course, but their style, their sexuality, their bravado, their delicacy, their cultivated arrogance, their narcissistic insecurity, their curious ambition have relevance to the way we live now. . . . Of course, what makes them beautiful is that they didn't know it.

Newman has recently reiterated this point in a reminiscence about writing the film: "*Bonnie and Clyde* is about style and people who have style. It is about people whose style set them apart from their time and place so that they seemed odd and aberrant to the general run of society."[7] That final scene in the car as the couple drive to Ivan Moss's home from town, sharing an apple, with Clyde (Warren Beatty) wearing John Lennon-style sunglasses with one lens missing and Bonnie (Faye Dunaway) tossing her hair with a huge smile, makes them 1960s flower children in 1930s garb. Similarly, from the very first, the writers envisioned that same upsetting mixture of tones in the film's most shocking moments. Describing the couple's first bank robbery gone awry, they specify: "We see, close-up, the face of the man explode in blood. . . . The entire scene should be funny and horrible at the same time due to the juxtaposition of events." (Figure 1) They further envisioned that each of the three major gunfights in the film would have a completely different rhythm and character, building toward the concluding massacre.

Newman and Benton's treatment sketches specific scenes in their essentials. The rollicking banjo-picking of Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt's "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" was to accompany the first grocery-store robbery getaway in West Dallas, followed by the swaying car and Bonnie's lusty advances to Clyde. The writers' description of the Parker family reunion sequence is an apt account of the scene as shot (Figure 2): "There are a lot of people gathered around but the sound is an indistinct mixture of talk, laughing, etc. The visual quality of the image is like the end of *Wild Strawberries*—a magic, isolated landscape seen from a distance, lit by bright sun." (Newman and Benton allude to Ingmar Bergman films throughout their treatment as if they were as familiar as *West Side Story* [1959]). The writers vividly described Blanche's (Estelle Parsons) "Keystone Cops" rescue by the gang on their way out of the Joplin, Missouri, ambush: "We see ahead Blanche running wildly—the car pulls up alongside her, the backdoor is flung open and, in almost the exaggerated style of an animated cartoon, two hands reach out, lift Blanche off her feet and pull her into the car. They speed away" (Figure 3).

While scripts often change systematically and dramatically from script drafts to screen, there are many more instances in which Newman and Benton's writing served as an exact blueprint for what we seen in the finished film. The very first script draft specified that the theft of Eugene's car was to begin with a shot of Eugene and Velma in the foreground, with the camera looking off into the street, just as Penn eventually filmed it (Figure 4). The Dexter meadow sequence where the gang recover from Buck's fatal wounding overnight

Figure 3. Rescuing Blanche

Figure 4. Velma and Eugene kiss while his car is stolen.

Figure 5. Dexter meadow: a certain *Seventh Seal* quality

Figure 6. Ménage à trois: Bonnie, Clyde, and C.W. (rear)

before another attack is also envisioned specifically: "By the dawn light they look like a troupe of traveling actors, living out of their caravan, sleeping in the fields, pursued by death. A certain *Seventh Seal* quality for just the first few establishing moments" (Figure 5). (For Newman and Benton, the violent posse stalks the gang's ephemeral repose like the black plague hovering over the knight and the actors in Bergman's film.) The posse's gleeful shooting of the Barrow gang's getaway car later in that same scene was to be "as painful to watch as the willful death of a human being. The execution is paced deliberately to show the ritualistic tempo of the destruction," a superb description of the scene's mechanics and meaning (a foretaste of the final massacre). It is extraordinary how detailed and prescient Newman and Benton's work was. As shot by Penn, each detail proves overwhelmingly moving and powerful, contributing to the film's seminal introduction of new rhythms and sentiments (our emotional investment in—and moral repugnance at—the quickly unfolding proceedings) as the film updates the gangster genre.

Much of the treatment changed, however, as Newman and Benton worked on later versions of the script. Their revision of *Bonnie and Clyde* followed three overarching tenets. They first strove to make Bonnie and Clyde a more conventionally romantic and appealing couple, given their personal idiosyncrasies. There was also the usual desire to telescope action to eliminate extraneous episodes in service of a more linear narrative line. Finally, script revisions created stronger connections among different story elements. At each stage, Newman and Benton followed the best ideas and suggestions Truffaut, Penn, or they themselves could come up with.

Reconceptualizing Bonnie and Clyde as individuals and as a couple was the central task facing Newman and Benton. Most dramatically, this involved altering the ménage à trois between Clyde, Bonnie, and the third gang member. The treatment and first script draft had Clyde explain to Bonnie, after rejecting her first advances, that prison changes a man. The C.W. Moss character they recruited was at this point much different from Michael J. Pollard's youthful, goofy bumpkin; he was an airheaded blond stud named W.D. Jones.

The gang's unconventional sexual relations were established early on. The first version of the script called for a one-shot scene immediately after Jones joins the couple. The trio enter a motel in long shot from across a highway. After a brief interval, Jones quickly stomps out in his underwear swearing, "I won't do that, ever!" before a naked but towel-wrapped Bonnie calms him and brings him back inside. The implication was unmistakable. In case anyone missed it, a fade-in revealed the trio awkwardly in bed the next morning, each trying to avoid eye contact with other, until Clyde and Bonnie burst into uncontrollable laughter.

Thereafter, the sexual trio was a comic leitmotif of this first script version. After the bank clerk is abruptly killed on the car's running board in Mineola, we find Bonnie at the bathroom mirror fixing herself up (in an echo, the first draft script notes, of her position in the opening scene of the film where she reluctantly dresses for work). In the background, Jones bathes himself, oblivious to Bonnie's allure, which angers her no end. As in the film, Bonnie then refuses Clyde's offer to take her home, and Clyde fails to make love to her. In the initial script, however, their interaction involves pointing guns at each other in a farrago of sado-

Figure 7. The gang's all here, with C.W. in his underwear

Figure 8. C.W. with the wounded Bonnie

masochistic foreplay. In the film, this scene of failed lovemaking ends with Bonnie's studied, casual shrug at Clyde's impotence; by contrast, in the first script draft, Bonnie casually walks to the door of the room and yells for Jones to come in to help them get going, as if she was calling him in for dinner. The scene fades out.

Nor was the trio's relationship to be a secret in this first version of the screenplay. After the entire gang, including Buck (Gene Hackman) and Blanche, has settled into the Joplin garage apartment, Bonnie again calls Jones into their bedroom. Much to Blanche's shock and outrage, Jones comes when called, walking in casually and reading a magazine. While they recuperate at Jones's father's house, Bonnie announces as they all sit at dinner that she and Clyde miss Jones, since he insists on sleeping alone under his father's roof.

As Newman and Benton soon discovered, however, no major Hollywood studio would even consider financing a film of their script (and certainly not without a major star attached to the project). The heroes were too bizarre and too violent for studio executive tastes. After Warren Beatty optioned the screenplay, he insisted, and Penn and the screenwriters agreed, that he would not play Clyde as written. Further, star, director, and writers agreed that the gang's alternative sexuality would probably diminish a mid-1960s audience's compassion for them, a sympathy that would prove so crucial for the film's success and notoriety. As Newman has recently recalled, "It was a time when people commonly called gays 'perverts' or worse and conventional thinking had homosexuality as a sickness . . . we risked alienating the audience from what we so badly wanted—that the audience would love and identify with Clyde and Bonnie from the outset, so that by the time the two start doing 'violent things,' it is too late for the audience to back away from their identification with the desperados." [8]

As Pauline Kael observed in her perceptive original review, however, traces of the original scenes do remain in the final film: "I'd guess that Newman and Benton, whose Bonnie seems to owe so much to Catherine in *Jules and Jim*, had more interesting ideas originally about Bonnie and Clyde's (and maybe C.W.'s) sex lives."[9] Most notably, Penn and the writers replaced the script's one-shot motel exterior scene, in which Bonnie gently persuades Jones to come back inside, with the film's one-shot interior scene (after C.W. Moss has joined the couple) of Bonnie leaning in frustration over Clyde, who plays possum in bed, while C.W. sleeps noisily in the background (Figure 6). Later in the film, when Bonnie emerges from a rented shack to meet Buck and Blanche, C.W. follows her in his underwear (Figure 7), suggesting a casual physical intimacy beyond their partnership in crime (Clyde has been waiting outside for Buck's car to arrive). After the Dexter meadow ambush where Buck is killed and Blanche is arrested, C.W. intimately intertwines arms with the injured Bonnie as they wait for Clyde to steal a new car (Figure 8).[10]

Of course Bonnie and Clyde's dedicated heterosexuality is affirmed (through dialogue and action) at many points in the finished film. By the time they and C.W. arrive at his father's home, C.W. seems very much like a surrogate child or foster brother (they constitute a new family like Natalie Wood, James Dean, and Sal Mineo in *Rebel Without a Cause*). The growing tenderness between the couple was also a product of rewriting. The scene of the couple finally making love, after Bonnie has read Clyde her poem, was an invention of

the September 1966 final revised script; no such scene appeared in the treatment or any of the early script versions; according to Penn, Beatty insisted on it.[11]

A great deal of this reconceptualizing of the couple centered on Bonnie specifically. In her earliest incarnation, Bonnie is Clyde's pal, exuberantly smoking cigars, tough and full of explosive anger (throwing ashtrays at the gang members when she wants privacy with Clyde), even though Newman and Benton intended for audiences to be smitten with her.

The changes in the script's portrait of Bonnie are apparent from the series of scenes immediately following the gang's one successful bank job. In the film, after Blanche's request for a share of the proceeds, Bonnie smolders in protest to Clyde. Her anger is sidestepped by the need for a new getaway car. The gang steals Eugene's car and "visit" with the undertaker and his girlfriend Velma (Evans Evans); Bonnie has the gang drop them off abruptly when Eugene informs them of his job; Bonnie becomes homesick and runs away from the gang, wanting to return home, and Clyde arranges for the evocative Parker family reunion.

In the earliest script version, however, Bonnie was less subdued and less vulnerable. Here, after Blanche called her a tramp, Bonnie pulled a gun and threatened to shoot Blanche point blank. When Clyde humiliated her into backing down, Bonnie fled the gang while Buck and Blanche laughed raucously at her. In a later

Above: Gunplay as foreplay

Right: Gene Hackman as Buck (left) and Michael J. Pollard as the tattooed C.W. Jones

Left: Confronting the law, with Denver Pyle as the sheriff

Below: A more romantic couple

scripted scene, Bonnie literally kicked a captured officer out of the car when she discovered newspaper reports that described her habit of cigar smoking. The encounter with Eugene and Velma was a random meeting that occurred after the Parker family reunion. Accordingly, the reunion scene originally had little of Bonnie's desperation that is so moving in the final film.

The rearrangement of these scenes was suggested by Penn's wife, a family therapist, who understood how the encounter with Eugene could affect Bonnie. Robert Towne, on location in Texas as script doctor, added Mrs. Parker's dialogue about their certain death ("You best keep runnin', Clyde Barrow") to tinge the reunion with the logic and emotion of Bonnie's homesickness. Towne also crafted Bonnie's subsequent, painful statement to Clyde: "You know, when we started out, I really thought we was really goin' somewhere. But this is it. We're just goin', huh?" Giving Bonnie a sense of what John Cawelti has characterized as tragic self-knowledge was thus a process that continued through various stages of scriptwriting. It was a crucial part of making Bonnie even more appealing to viewers.[12]

Thus, with each script revision, Newman and Benton (and in this instance, Penn and Towne) crafted a more romantic central couple, particularly giving Bonnie a softness (as with a shot of her comforting Blanche after Buck is fatally wounded) that conformed more closely to traditional notions of femininity, alongside her rebellious and unconventional nature. Between Bonnie's cigar smoking and the hints of the sexual triangle, it is no wonder that Pauline Kael pointed to Truffaut's

Catherine of *Jules and Jim* (1961) as a major model for the screenwriters. By contrast, the only major change Clyde underwent in revision was Penn's addition of his intuitive social consciousness, his almost accidental taking-on of the cause of the dispossessed as justification for his life of crime.

Besides characterization, Newman and Benton's script revisions affected the film's range of narration, minimizing scenes where Bonnie and Clyde do not appear. One of *Bonnie and Clyde*'s hallmarks is the unprecedented amount of time we spend confined with the gang and knowing only what they know. This technique vividly evokes the gang's disorienting existence and creates the film's celebrated shifts in tone, like that which moves from the stillness of Bonnie's poetry reading in Joplin to the frantic police raid that interrupts it. As the film progresses, the scenes occurring without the gang increase (from the one in which the injured butcher identifies Clyde to the cutaways back to the West Texas bank where the robbery witnesses have become newspaper celebrities). In general, the script revisions worked toward keeping the audience confined to scenes with the gang.[13]

Revisions also affected narrative structure, telescoping lengthy sequences into short, unified scenes, and making the action of the film more linear. In early drafts, Bonnie was to learn to shoot a gun in a series of scenes which Newman and Benton explicitly compared to Eliza Doolittle's diction lessons in George Cukor's *My Fair Lady* (1964). Episodic scenes that established or reiterated character traits were omitted (a lunch where Bonnie complains to Clyde about their lack of privacy and W.D. Jones drowns his food in sugar, or a lengthy scene where Frank Hamer demonstrates his superior crime-fighting acumen to some deputies). Much of the information we learn from Buck and Clyde when they first talk alone—Buck's personal history, and details of Clyde's incarceration—originally was scripted for a scene of Buck and Blanche en route to meet Clyde and Bonnie. Reapportioning the dialogue allows us to meet Buck and Blanche only when Bonnie and Clyde do, another way in which the film aligns our knowledge of events and characters so closely to theirs.

Further deletions pushed the action along in an intriguing way, creating pronounced jumps forward in the narrative, giving the film its quick pace and visual style, so that it fairly hurls forward with the speed of *Jules and Jim* or *Breathless* (1959).

Particularly striking in this regard are the eliminated scenes of Clyde scheming away. In the first complete script, Bonnie and Clyde's "interview" of C.W. for the job of getaway driver/mechanic originally came after Clyde—smarting from his struggle with the butcher who nearly killed him—articulated their need for a third gang member. In the film, they simply meet and recruit C.W. after a fade-out. A similar revision process eliminated Clyde's realization that the gang needs a fourth member—Buck—after C.W. botches the Mineola job (by neatly parking the getaway car) where the bank teller gets shot. Thus the creation of what Lester Friedman has called Clyde's "alternative family" occurs "naturally" and gradually in the film, an expression of Clyde's need for community rather than his cold calculations as to how to rob more effectively.[14]

Indeed, we never see the gang *plan* a bank robbery or reflect on how to do their jobs better—they just take action. After Clyde's ludicrous first bank robbery attempt, a scripted scene showed the couple pulling up to a grocery store; in the film, we cut from their getaway to Clyde already holding up the store with a bag of groceries in his hand. We never see Bonnie and Clyde buying new clothes, but they are fashion plates when they attempt each bank robbery (somewhere between the Busby Berkeley movie and the motel room, Bonnie has managed to pick up a golddigger necklace).

The deletion of these scenes provides the much-remarked spontaneity of Bonnie and Clyde that endears them to us as social rebels. Thus while the script evolved into a more linear—we might say more "classical Hollywood"—pattern of action, the omission of intervening scenes rendered the narration of the film less informative than in earlier drafts. Simultaneously, such omissions, augmented by Penn and Allen's editing technique, gave *Bonnie and Clyde* its relentless momentum.

In this process of quickening the action, as in the original conception of the ménage à trois, we can also see the close connection between the French New Wave and Hollywood cinema. The New Wave's reworking of Hollywood genres deployed a "shorthand," to use Dede Allen's term,[15] relying on audience familiarity with genre conventions to create parodies of the genres, barely credible story worlds, characters and narrative lines, that unfold with spectacular speed and without psychological realism. The original treatment for *Bonnie and Clyde* reflects this heightened consciousness of genre tradition without the clipped pace of the final film.

What was François Truffaut's role in the script's revision and transformation? He read Newman and Benton's original treatment in late March, 1964, and this fact, and his initial plans to direct the movie, are often invoked to explain its New Wave qualities. What is not

Figure 9. Blanche demands a share

Figure 10. Reconciliation

so well known is that, as I have shown, the treatment and script drafts Newman and Benton had prepared to date already emulated the French New Wave. Moreover, Truffaut's own suggestions, while urging the neophyte screenwriters to give their treatment stronger dramatic shape, pushed the film toward a more conventional dramaturgy.[16]

For one thing, Truffaut encouraged Newman and Benton to elaborate on and shift their characterizations of the characters. He advised them very specifically to develop J.D.'s father's dislike of his son's tattoo into a major obsession, and to make the father into a dissembler who "surprises" the audience ("Perhaps make him always surprising, so he always does the unexpected, the height of hypocrisy . . . he makes out gang is great but turns them in, etc. It should be *stimulating* for us to see Ivan")[17]. He proposed that the writers draw out Clyde's humiliating, first failed robbery attempt (of the bank that has folded); the writers had Clyde make the teller explain the situation to Bonnie, and have her laugh at him as they drive away.

More significantly, Truffaut suggested that Bonnie be made more appealing. It was his idea that the hypocritical Blanche do something to inspire Bonnie's antagonism ("Perhaps Blanche made a blunder that endangered the whole group. Strengthen Bonnie's motive"), a comment that inspired Blanche's request for a share of the take on top of her panic attack during the Joplin ambush (Figure 9). Truffaut also urged that the script show Bonnie and Clyde reconciling after each fight (Figure 10), rather than leaving their disputes over Blanche unresolved without either one giving in, and making love in some way just before their death ("We must be reminded . . . all the way through . . . of the love aspects of B and C"); Beatty's insistence on this before principal photography carried Truffaut's concept to realization. Significantly, as well, Truffaut encouraged the writers to develop the implications of the gang's ménage à trois (how does Bonnie regard J.W. after Buck and Blanche arrive?).

Most surprisingly, Truffaut focused not on opening the film up to more playful, disparate elements à la *Shoot the Piano Player*, but on unifying it to give it greater aesthetic coherence. Newman and Benton originally began the film with Clyde following Bonnie on the street; their relationship took off from there. Truffaut urged the writers to begin the film with a scene of Bonnie alone, on the grounds that their first meeting would otherwise occur too abruptly for the audience to absorb. As David Newman's notes on their meeting with Truffaut put it, "Greater dramatic unity was often stressed by FT." "FT" noted that Newman and Benton, like many first-time writers, had overwritten their story: there were too many scenes generally in the treatment. Truffaut broke it down into 28 segments, tying each one together. For example, he suggested that Bonnie and Clyde's initial meeting, first robbery, and first meal together all take place in a single day; or that various scenes of the gang settling into their apartment in Joplin, Missouri, cooking, playing checkers, writing poetry, again be combined into one day.

Like a veteran of Hollywood script conferences, Truffaut suggested constant planting of characters, places, and ideas to show the causes of subsequent actions. Newman and Benton should show the delivery boy (from a laundry in the treatment) in Joplin overhearing some dialogue from the gang that makes him suspicious; in the film he hears Blanche saying "Clyde,

Figure 11. Arousing suspicion

Figure 12. Humiliating Hamer

look at Bonnie"—a dead giveaway, which in turn sets up the surprise attack on the gang (Figure 11). Truffaut was also critical of a series of episodes late in the script in which Clyde holds up a hamburger stand and robs a gas station after filling up. He then pays for having his clothes laundered, showing how Clyde values and will pay for work well done, even if it means he is inconsistent. To Truffaut, these scenes were, in Newman's notes, "patternless episodes." They needed to lead somewhere, to be "connected more closely to your scenario," perhaps to answer the question "How does the gang relate to and use money?" Penn and Towne's late rearrangement of the scenes with Eugene and Velma, of Bonnie's attempt to run away from the gang, and of the family reunion, also fulfill this principle.

Figure 13. The swerve shot

Truffaut also offered suggestions on making Sheriff Frank Hamer a connecting thread through the film. The original treatment called for the gang to amuse themselves by kidnapping and humiliating a police officer, and then to leave him in the middle of nowhere. Truffaut suggested that the officer in question be Hamer, the man who ultimately kills them. In Newman's notes on the French director's comments, one can sense his excitement from the punctuation:

> The policeman they kidnap and throw out of the car should be Hamer! There will be great satisfaction for the audience if . . . much later in the film . . . when the police deputies talk and talk about this great person and then when he appears . . . it is a face we've seen before.

The finished film did without a subsequent, scripted segment showing other officers speaking of Hamer's accomplishments; and of course, the gang and the audience know who Hamer is when Clyde surprises him. Still, Newman and Benton took Truffaut's other suggestion for this scene: that the writers strengthen Hamer's motive (much as they should do with Bonnie's dislike of Blanche), by having Bonnie humiliate him—the photo of Hamer's capture by the gang and Bonnie's generous kiss was the result (Figure 12).

In all these ways, then, Truffaut encouraged the first-time screenwriters to revise their script away from a series of random encounters (bookended by Clyde's first robbery and the couple's death) to a more tightly woven narrative. In fact, of Truffaut's many suggestions for developing the script, only four brought the film closer to the playful style of his own films. The French director encouraged the writers to extend and elaborate

Figure 14. The Hitchcockian treatment begins: Bonnie reads her poem to Clyde . . . cut to

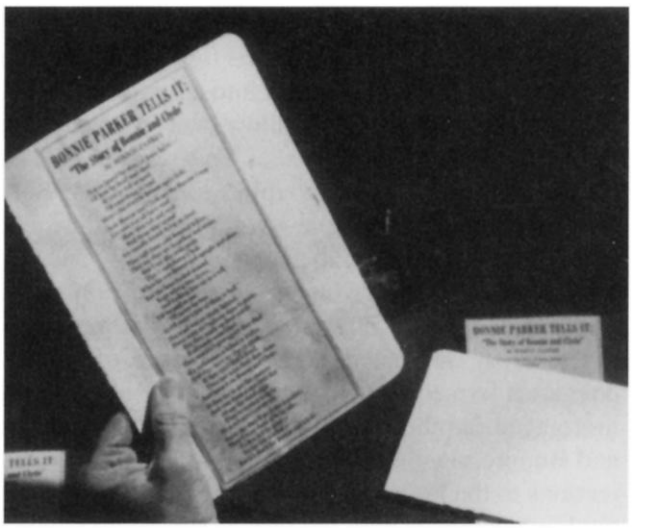


Figure 15. The poem in the newspaper . . . cut to

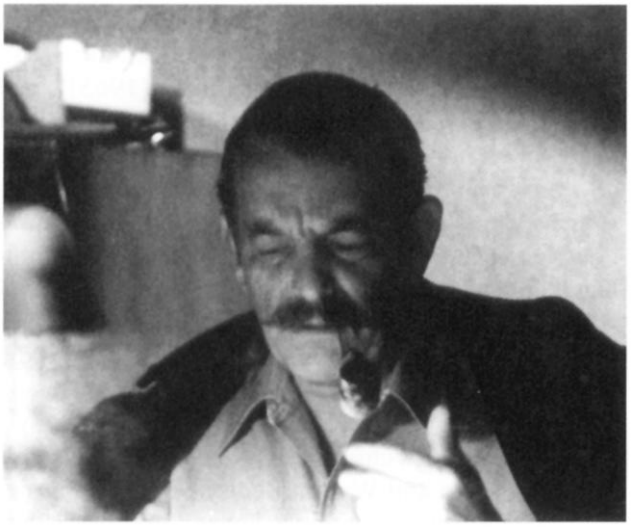


Figure 16. Hamer reading the poem in a newspaper . . . cut to

Figure 17. Bonnie reading to Clyde from the newspaper

the series of shots of the swerving car on the country road after Clyde's very first store robbery (Figure 13)—they would become the signature getaway scenes of the film. (He also exhorted Newman and Benton to make the gang's escape from that first, Joplin ambush more elaborate than the several shots envisioned in their treatment—it became the bravura montage sequence we see in the film.) He recommended that the writers render the scene of the self-conscious Bonnie and Clyde taking pictures of themselves to be "emblematic of their fame," so that even Bonnie's mother can say she has seen newspaper clippings at the family reunion.

Most dramatically, Truffaut inspired the two writers to dramatically rescript their handling of Bonnie's poem, "The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde." According to Newman and Benton's treatment, Bonnie was to read "The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde" in its entirety, with portions read by a policeman from a newspaper. The French director suggested they use a "Hitchcockian way" of cutting from Bonnie reading, to a police officer, to seeing it in the newspaper, and back to Bonnie, all unified by Bonnie or other characters' voices. As it is shot, with Bonnie reading through an abridged version of the poem, we cut to a shot of the poem in newsprint, then to a shot of Hamer reading it, before coming back to Bonnie, with the entire sequence visualizing the mythologizing power of Bonnie's piece (Figures 14–17).

In short, Truffaut offered David Newman and Robert Benton a rich mine of ideas for developing their vivid and suggestive treatment into a first-draft script, with principles they would follow later in preparation for principal photography. As we have seen, several revisions of the script—the couple's romance and Bonnie's character, for example—were further influenced by Arthur Penn's input and direction. Penn is generally credited, for example, with the elements of 1930s rural America (the Roosevelt posters and other iconography of the Great Depression—the Okie truck of the dispossessed farmer, and the shattering of windows at the mortgaged farmhouse). In earlier script drafts, Clyde and Bonnie meet a farmer who simply asked for directions to the highway; Penn added the notion of the random encounter with the farmer supplying Clyde's rationale for bank robbing (Figure 18). The crosscutting back to the bank witnesses who enjoy their fame was another strategy that appeared late in the revisions, at Penn's instigation.

And of course, the final ambush was visualized and shot by Penn. While in New York and after reading Newman and Benton's treatment, Truffaut had invited them to a screening of Joseph H. Lewis's *Gun Crazy* (1949), and he pointed out, as a flaw to be avoided, the lengthy, dragged-out quality of the final shootout in the misty swamp. Newman and Benton scripted an abrupt final shootout accordingly (based as well on their research on the couple's lives and death), but their treatment and early scripts described a distinctly different approach from that of the final film:

> *At no point* in the gun-fight do we see Bonnie and Clyde in motion. We see, instead, two still photographs cut into the sequence: one of Clyde, half out of the car, taking careful dead aim with his gun, just as he did in the teaching [Bonnie to shoot] scene; one of Bonnie, in terror, a pack of cigarettes in her hand clutched tight, looking as fragile and beautiful as she can.

Penn decided that such an abstract presentation of their death could be better visualized with the slow motion, multi-camera, multi-speed massacre he filmed, and which he described as "spastic, but balletic."[18]

Even with the script's counter-culture sensibility, its casual dismantling of a traditional film genre, and its extraordinary commingling of sexual frustration and gory violence, *Bonnie and Clyde* could easily have been shot as a more conventional film had Penn not enjoyed unusual freedom in production. Penn secured the

Figure 18. Random encounter à la Penn

right to location shooting in Texas. He insisted on a contractual right to final cut (after the studio recutting of his previous film, The *Chase* [1965]), and arranged to edit the film in New York City, which kept studio interference to a minimum. These preconditions allowed Penn his "breathless" approach to the film's visual style, as well as the latest revisions to the script.[19]

Significantly, once the ménage à trois was eliminated, few of the script revisions noted above were inspired by MPAA or Warner Bros. studio concerns. Jack L. Warner, still the reigning (but soon to retire) studio head, found the point blank shooting of the bank clerk, as well as various expletives like "Christ!" offensive. Story development chief Curtis Kenyon conveyed this to Arthur Penn and Warren Beatty prior to their departure for location shooting in Texas. "In general, they were very cooperative and appreciate the necessity for keeping brutality and profanity to a minimum," Kenyon reported to Warner afterwards. "They asked me to remind you, however, that these were rough, tough people and that a certain amount of salty expressions were needed to give the picture flavor."[20] The action and language remained in the film.

Geoffrey Shurlock of the MPPA's self-regulating but recently dismantled Production Code Administration wrote Jack Warner in mid-October 1966 that the basic story was acceptable, but he made several notations, writing, of the very first scene, "It is still, obviously, a bold and even tasteless idea to suggest that Bonnie exposes herself so shamelessly to Clyde, and that it is on this basis that their attraction to each other begins and is founded. Therefore, the acceptability of

this sequence will depend entirely on the manner in which it appears on the screen."[21] Warner Bros. production vice-president Walter MacEwen found dailies of Bonnie alone in her room "done with such admirable taste and circumspection he could find nothing remotely offensive in the scene."[22] Shurlock would ultimately agree. Shurlock also protested the profanity and coarse language, the "grossly animalistic" sexual attraction between Clyde and Bonnie, the brutality of pistol whipping the grocery store butcher and shooting the bank clerk point blank, and Bonnie's "sexual assault" on Sheriff Hamer. But these elements remained in the final cut, and the film got its seal of approval on May 15, 1967.[23]

As if testifying to *Bonnie and Clyde*'s innovations, a firestorm of critical controversy greeted the film's premiere, as traditional reviewers such as the *New York Times*'s Bosley Crowther decried it as "a cheap piece of bald-faced slapstick comedy" with a "blending of farce with brutal killings [which] is as pointless as it is lacking in taste." Crowther left his post soon afterwards; other critics publicly reversed their dismissal of the film when audience enthusiasm made them reconsider it.[24] The film was on its way to becoming a "classic," as a harbinger of a new sensibility in American filmmaking, one inspired by the French New Wave.

Bonnie and Clyde—dressed to kill

When Arthur Penn and Warren Beatty screened *Bonnie and Clyde* for the retiring Jack Warner, Beatty was compelled by Warner's dismissive response ("What the hell was that?") to place his production in the great tradition of Warner Bros. gangster films. When Pauline Kael reviewed it, she placed it alongside *You Only Live Once* and other classic criminal couple-on-the-run films, noting as well that "the young French directors discovered the poetry of crime of American life (from our movies) and showed the Americans how to put it on the screen in a new, "existential" way."[25] Indeed, with *Breathless* and *Shoot the Piano Player*, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut could place the fleeing gangster into the context of American film genres while playing with conventions so obviously that their films became examples of modernist cinema. While Kael's understanding of the film was remarkably prescient, her criticism of Penn for embracing the French influence now seems wrongheaded, since so much of what is innovative in the film derives from Newman, Benton, and Penn's wonderful alchemy.

The impetus for and concept of *Bonnie and Clyde* came from outside Hollywood—two film buff journalists who knew what they loved about recent French films and who were willing to take to heart the advice of their mentor. The great irony of its genesis was that Truffaut urged the writers against emulating his own loose, episodic narrative construction even further in shaping the architecture of their film. The lesson Truffaut imparted was that one had to emulate the conventions and aesthetic values of the classical American genre film before one could play with the form in a more innovative fashion. It is impossible to think of another film besides *Bonnie and Clyde* that, after continual script revision, more thoroughly integrates Hollywood and French New Wave filmmaking. However, as Truffaut's contributions to the script demonstrate, they were in certain respects not that far apart to begin with.

Matthew Bernstein teaches film studies at Emory University. His anthology, *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era,* was just published by Rutgers University Press.

I thank David Newman for graciously making available his script drafts for *Bonnie and Clyde* and for talking with me at generous

length about the experience of writing and developing the film. I also thank Ned Comstock and his staff at the USC Performing Arts Library for their ever-efficient and courteous help.

Notes

1. Tom Luddy and David Thomson, "Penn on Penn," in *Projections 4*, John Boorman, Tom Luddy, David Thomson, and Walter Donohue, eds. (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 128.
2. See, for example, the "Since 1960" chapter in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 32–36; Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 310–23; and my "Model Criminals: Visual Style in *Bonnie and Clyde*," in Lester D. Friedman, ed., *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 101–26.
3. Until 1999, the only accounts of the making of the film aside from interviews were David Newman and Robert Benton's essay, "Lightning in a Bottle," in Sandra Wake and Nicola Hayden, eds., *The "Bonnie and Clyde" Book* (London: Lorrimer, 1972), 13–31; and Lawrence I. Murray, "Hollywood, Nihilism and the Youth Culture of the Sixties: *Bonnie and Clyde*," in John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, eds., *American History/American Film* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979), 237–56. See two new reminiscences by Arthur Penn and David Newman: Penn, "Making Waves: The Directing of *Bonnie and Clyde*," and Newman, "What's It Really All About?: Pictures at an Execution," in *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 11–31 and 32–41, respectively.
4. Newman and Benton, "Lightning in a Bottle."
5. The comments which follow, and all discussion of script revisions, come from an examination of Newman and Benton's original treatment and five undated script drafts undertaken between 1964 and 1966, all in the possession of screenwriter David Newman, New York City. The final revised script was dated September 6, 1966, although several crucial changes were made through December as the film was shot.

   John G. Cawelti provides an abbreviated comparison of the revised final script (which he calls the "original script") and finished film in John G. Cawelti, ed., *Focus on "Bonnie and Clyde"* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 138–45.

   The script printed in *The "Bonnie and Clyde" Book* is neither the final revised script nor the finished film, but a combination of the two. It is useful as a record of dialogue spoken in the film, but it is a less reliable record of what exactly is in the final script or in the finished film. For example, the published script describes Bonnie taking out a mirror to fix her hair in the roadhouse restaurant, but she doesn't in the finished film—a detail in keeping with the notion that Clyde is her mirror. The published script has Buck laughing at Bonnie's attempt to flee the gang to return home, but of course, he doesn't ridicule her in the film but aids in finding her. The published script also neglects certain details of editing and mise-en-scène: for example, it does not note the fade-out between Clyde's stealing a second car and Bonnie waking up alone in the farmhouse the next morning after their first meal together; it does not describe the hospitalized butcher's significant look of recognition when he sees a mug shot of Clyde; etc.
6. See Steve Alan Carr, "From 'Fucking Cops!' to 'Fucking Media!': *Bonnie and Clyde* for a Sixties America," in *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 70–101, for a discussion of Newman and Benton's notion of the "new sentimentality."
7. David Newman, "What's It Really All About?" 38.
8. Newman, "What's It Really All About?" 36–37. Penn has stated his reasoning that if the gang were so "sophisticated" as to sustain a ménage à trois, their "ordinariness . . . could not survive" plausibly in the script (Luddy and Thomson, 37). See also Penn's comments in his essay, "Making Waves," 18: "My recall from early memories was that the crop of bank robbers . . . were in fact country folk; they were farmers or children of farmers, bumpkins most of them, frequently all but illiterate. They were willing to settle for the small sums they snatched from country banks, but they certainly did not seem to me figures that belonged in complicated sexual arrangements." Penn's assumption that country bumpkins were all heterosexual is of course just that: an assumption.
9. Pauline Kael, "Crime and Poetry," *The "Bonnie and Clyde" Book*, 204.
10. Liora Moriel provides the only sustained reading of the film's traces of bisexual and gay elements in "Erasure and Taboo: A Queer Reading of *Bonnie and Clyde*," in *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 148–76. She singles out other scenes, such as Clyde's byplay with C.W. and neglect of Bonnie, as evidence of their partially erased homoerotic bond.

WELCOME

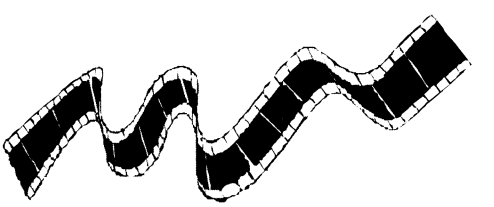
The editor and editorial board members of *Film Quarterly* wish to welcome Akira Mizuta Lippit and Chon Noriega to the journal. Akira Lippit, Associate Professor of Film Studies and Critical Theory in the Program in Film and Visual Studies at UC Irvine and author of *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*, joins the *FQ* editorial board; Chon Noriega, Vice-Chair of the Department of Film and Television at UCLA and author of, most recently, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema*, joins the journal as its new Los Angeles Editor. We are delighted that both of these fine scholars will be giving us the benefit of their impressive knowledge and expertise.

11. Penn, "Making Waves," 21. Other script revisions made the couple more appealing by omitting their narcissism. One change eliminated a scene showing the couple admiring their stylish dress before a bank job; another cut scene shows them in the Platte City motel, dressed as corpses for their own funeral and giggling at themselves in a mirror before the "laws" attack. Even in the final revised draft, while recuperating at the Moss home and even through their final day, Clyde plans to kidnap a millionaire (it's easier than robbing banks). In the film, by omitting Clyde's last bit of scheming, Newman and Benton preserved his and Bonnie's final incarnation as a carefree, loving couple, senselessly slaughtered after consummating their romance.
12. Penn describes Towne's contributions in "Making Waves," 22–24.
13. See Cawelti's "The Artistic Power of *Bonnie and Clyde*," in *Focus on "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 45, 48.
14. Lester D. Friedman, "Introduction: Arthur Penn's Enduring Gangsters," in *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 6.
15. Ric Gentry, "An Interview with Dede Allen," *Film Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 21.
16. Surprisingly, the recently translated biography of Truffaut does not discuss Truffaut's reactions to Newman and Benton's script; instead it discusses the deal making behind Truffaut's possible direction of the film and its collapse. See Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *Truffaut*, Catherine Temerson, trans. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 210–12.
17. This quote and all subsequent quotes regarding the script come from David Newman's "Notes on Meeting with Truffaut—March 30, 1964," in Newman's possession.
18. Penn, "Making Waves," 21. See Stephen Prince's excellent essay on the violence in the film, "The Hemorrhaging of American Cinema: *Bonnie and Clyde*'s Legacy of Cinematic Violence," in *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 127–47.
19. After an August 31, 1966 contract signing between Warner Bros. and Warren Beatty and Arthur Penn's production companies, the basic plan for the film called for a $1,608,000 negative cost, nearly a third of which ($528,479) represented salaries for the stars, cast, director, screenwriters, and producer; roughly a third of the production costs ($311,896) would be location shooting, taking up 62 days in and around Dallas. (John W. Wylie, Estimating Budget, October 1966, *Bonnie and Clyde* Production Files, Warner Bros. Archive, Library of Performing Arts, Doheny Library, University of Southern California. All documentation on the production of the film derives from this file.)

    Principal photography began on October 11, 1966 in Midlothian, Texas, outside of Dallas. Here Penn directed the first scenes of Clyde and Bonnie's meeting; he shot roughly in script order, returning every ten days or so to a Dallas studio to shoot all interior scenes (and these also were shot in sequence, starting, on Day 9, with the very first shots of Bonnie alone in her room, the butcher in the hospital room, and that one-shot scene of the couple in a motel room with C.W.); even the final ambush was shot during the shoot's final days. Penn proved a fairly efficient director, taking between one and three minutes of footage per day, with daily setups ranging from 13 (Clyde's first attempt at lovemaking in a motel room) to 29 (for the Parker reunion and the Dexter meadow ambush) and recording anywhere from half a script page (for the elaborate Joplin gun battle) to 4 1/2 pages (for the scene of splitting up the robbery proceeds with Blanche). Shooting took 68 days, finally ending on January 6 with various car process shots.

    Penn and Dede Allen edited the film in New York, a practice that gradually infuriated the studio brass, especially veteran mogul Jack L. Warner, who, as early as January 3, demanded that no further dailies be sent to New York: "I would not have gone through with this contract if I had known these uncalled-for gimmicks were in it." J.L. Warner, Memo to Walter MacEwen, 3 January, 1967. Dubbing and looping of lines, as well as additional second-unit work of car chases, was finished by mid-May.
20. Curtis Kenyon, Memo to J.L. Warner, 23 September, 1966, *Bonnie and Clyde* Production Files, Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. All studio correspondence is from this source.
21. Geoffrey Shurlock, Letter to J.L. Warner, 13 October, 1966.
22. Curtis Kenyon, Letter to Warren Beatty, 17 October, 1966.
23. MPAA, Letter to J.L. Warner, 15 May, 1967. Warner also protested that in the finished film's credit sequence, "the subliminal flashes of period still pictures were so short as to be confusing rather than effective." They remained unchanged. W. MacEwen, Memo to Warren Beatty, 25 May, 1967.

    Curtis Kenyon, of the story department, wrote studio vice-president Walter MacEwen that he feared audiences would be let down by not knowing, after Bonnie and Clyde's first night together (at the abandoned farmhouse), whether or not they had slept together. Curtis Kenyon, Memo to W. MacEwen, 13 September, 1966.
24. Bosley Crowther, "*Bonnie and Clyde* Arrives," *New York Times*, August 14, 1967; rpt. in *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 177–78. See Carr, "From 'Fucking Cops' to 'Fucking Media!'," for a discussion of the film's critical reception.
25. Kael, "*Bonnie and Clyde*," in *The "Bonnie and Clyde" Book*, 203.



Devin Orgeron

Re-Membering History in Isaac Julien's *The Attendant*

The late 80s and the early part of the 90s greeted the black British independent film scene with a swell of both popular and critical interest. Such enthusiasm was fostered in part by a host of films from the British-based Sankofa collective, accompanied by the determined coverage of those films by the British film journals *Sight and Sound* and *Screen*.[1] Visually and theoretically rich films, many reminiscent of Jean-Luc Godard's best work, made their way to American screens and it seemed, if only for a moment (the late 90s saw a return to the usual bleak prospects), that independent cinema was once again vital, engaged, and engaging. Isaac Julien was a central figure in this movement. His provocative short film *Looking for Langston* (1989) stands as a testament to the cinema's ability to address issues of race, gender, and sexuality in decidedly sophisticated and perfectly readable ways. Isaac Julien has not ceased making and writing about films.[2] However, the marginalization of his later work (the analogy with Godard still holds) threatens to keep it invisible.

The Attendant: constructing fantasy images

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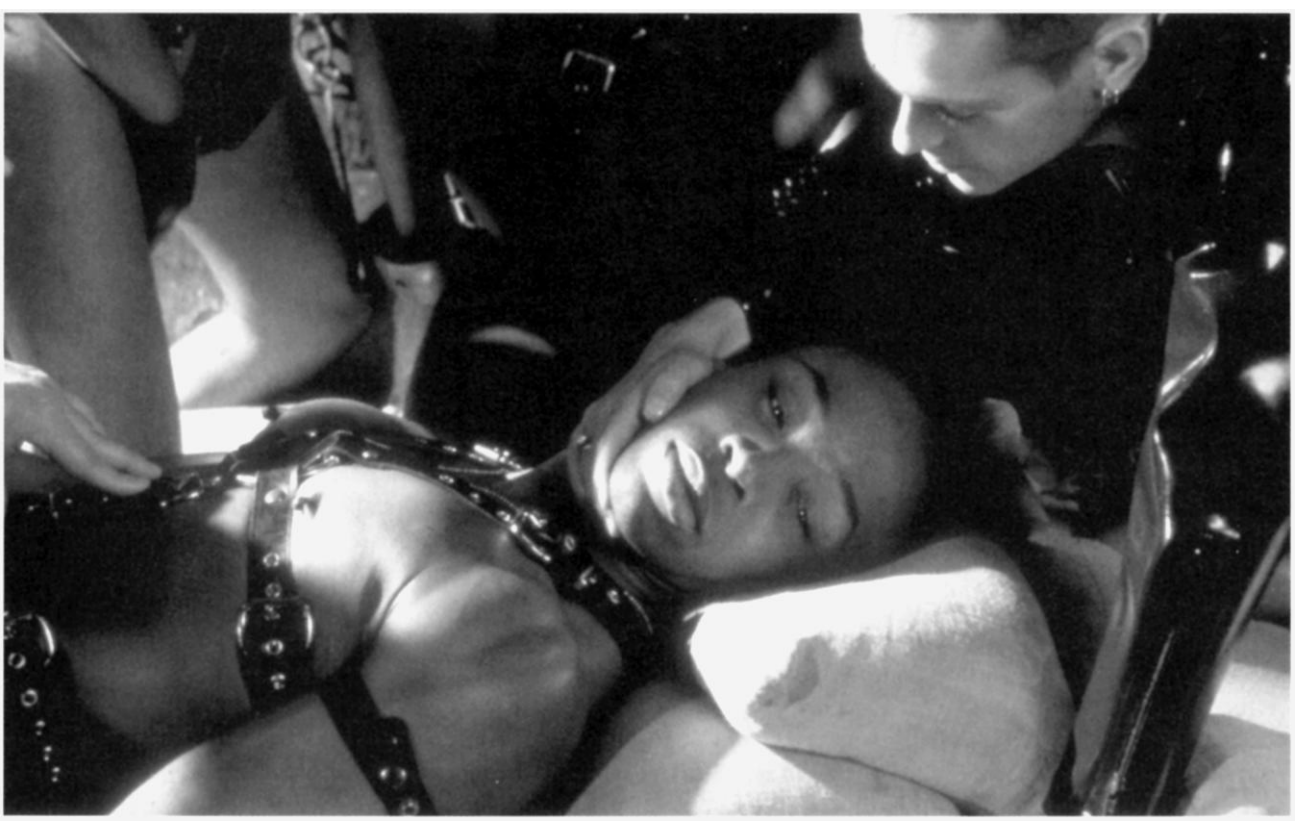
Julien's rarely discussed 1993 film *The Attendant* operates within the continuum of his fascinations with time and space, and with the slipperiness of each of these categories when coupled with issues of sexuality and race. The film takes as its primary location a space apart from the club or park spaces of Julien's earlier films *Looking for Langston* and *Young Soul Rebels* (1991)—spaces established as "queer" in Julien's other work. The action in *The Attendant* occurs within a large, white marble museum surrounded by columns—the ultimate architectural signifier of "establishment." Julien's use of this classical space subverts and rewrites traditional notions of history as they have become narrativized within the sacred space of the museum. The very word "museum" suggests a type of stasis, a motionless memorialization, which is frequently explored and exploded in Julien's films. *Looking for Langston*, for example, disrupts an archival approach to Hughes and opts instead for a highly dynamic, meditative treatment of the Harlem Renaissance poet and his work that relies as much on the transportative abilities of fantasy as it does on the sometimes restrictive notions of text, document, and/or footage.

The Attendant is a short film "about" a black museum attendant who, from the shots that establish the location of the place and patrons he is "attending to," works in a space where representation (through painting or sculpture) is largely based on white (and heterosexual) notions of history and memory. The opening image in the film—a painting of a slave capture—ties violence and bondage to those notions of history and memory. Fantasy intervenes as the Attendant reorganizes the opening image, transforming it into an interracial S/M scene. Such fantastical transformations play with ideas of captive and captor, while also embodying Julien's fascination with fantasy as a vital component of history. History is, to borrow a term from Toni Morrison, "re-membered"[3] in Isaac Julien's cinema, and *The Attendant* makes this transformative performance explicit.

Julien's work is largely designed to reach a theoretically knowledgeable spectator, and in *The Attendant* traditional notions of cinematic pleasure are thwarted because of the formal and contextual machines at work in the film. *Looking for Langston*, Julien's most widely screened and discussed film, seems less



Fantasy slave capture—forbidden pleasures

didactic in its approach and has been applauded for appealing to a very large audience in academic as well as gay and lesbian circles. Part of what keeps *The Attendant* invisible is its participation in the conventions of art-house cinema. It is an extremely short film (eight minutes) that, by virtue of its duration and its lack of a coherent, linear narrative, problematizes the possibility of narrative pleasure. A certain familiarity with Julien's other work, with art-house cinema in general, with theory and theoreticians, and with gay and lesbian film are assumed prerequisites for what would be Julien's "ideal spectator."

While Julien's cinema is thus exclusionary to a certain degree, it is also an extremely vital and necessary one. His work foregrounds the black British avant-garde's struggle to find a mode of representation removed from white Hollywood and from the British mainstream. In *The Attendant* Julien utilizes the avant-garde short film form to re-member history by restructuring the ways it has traditionally been recorded. In placing fantasy and the repressed on a level of equal (or greater) status to history or reality, Julien questions the accepted constraints history has on the real human subject—in this case the black, male, and gay subject. By looking back to the historical representation of blacks in classical art, he posits that fantasy might compensate for the gaps in these representations.

Julien's treatment of history often takes a broad and circular route, in part ensuring that his films will evoke the label "avant-garde," and his didacticism seems to further categorize his work in this way. There has always been a tendency in film criticism to designate the theoretically informed work as avant-garde (thereby casting it into the realm of "pompous" high art) without addressing what might be going on that is "other" than avant-garde. The lack of linearity and dialogue (traditional signifiers of reality versus fantasy), and a self-conscious formalism align Julien's films not only with the avant-garde but also, for instance, with the tradition of magical realism. The fact that his films are able to take a specific historical subject (Langston Hughes) or a specific architectural space (a museum) and turn those very notions of history and space on their ear is magical, if only in cinematic terms. Whether one finds it fruitful or not to classify *The Attendant* as avant-garde, it seems necessary to also consider other traditions the film draws upon. Chief among these are magical realism, the African tradition of the griot story teller, camp, and gay beefcake film—none of which are typically termed avant-garde or "high art."

Looking for Langston is shot entirely in black-and-white, keeping the contents of the montage well within the "safe" category of "dream" or "meditation," but also easing the transitions between found footage and his own. *The Attendant* contains both black-and-white and color film stock, but the transitions between them work in a related though opposite way: they disrupt the continuity and draw attention to themselves, causing the viewer to consider their significance. Where black-and-white in *Langston* is related to the world of dream and fantasy, *The Attendant* works in the opposite way (and in the tradition of *The Wizard of Oz*): The scenes we would want to look at as fantasy are shot in color, while the "real" scenes are in black-and-white. The scene following the title of *The Attendant* is shot entirely in black-and-white and locates the film externally. In these outside shots the viewer sees a large, white marble building surrounded by pillars. It is elevated, and stairs lead up to its entrance. Seen in a point-of-view shot, the building is superior to its surroundings and to the spectator as well. The classical historical renderings that adorn the building are also envisioned as superior to the onlooker.

While these establishing shots imply only that our setting is traditional, the interior shots make it clear that the space we have entered is a museum. White marble busts (suggesting the image in stasis) surround this interior space, echoing the pillars outside, and the walls are covered with paintings. The well-dressed patrons, however, seem slightly uninterested or rushed in their examination of the museum's contents. We are here introduced to the film's namesake, the black museum Attendant, who, in these early scenes, is nearly immobile, like the busts adorning the interior of the building. He moves only within the limited space of the museum and later is seated behind a large desk, checking the bags of patrons as they enter the museum (a precaution introduced into British museums because of the threat of terrorism). There is some implication that their content is illicit from the exchange of gazes which occurs between one white patron and the Attendant.

The opening image of the film, which is followed by the title and the establishing shot, is recognizable as a product of the classical arts even to those unfamiliar with the painting. The camera zooms in on a detail of F.A. Biard's *Scene on the Coast of Africa* and, despite the fact that the camera does not linger on its subject and that the subject is shot through a contracting iris lens, certain elements establish the historical and generic referent for the image. The painting depicts a slave capture, and the subjects within the painting are in various stages of captivity and violence. In the upper left-hand corner of the painting a white hand can be seen wielding a whip. This classical image will inform

the ways in which the film as a whole can be read. What is immediately recognizable is the fact that the image, despite the movement of the camera, is stationary. While action is "implied" by the raised whip, action or mobility is only "represented" in paintings. This stasis suggests that classical visual art is able to "freeze" representation and history in a way that makes its subversion seem impossible. The task of Julien's film is not only to deny the authoritative permanence of the stationary arts, but to suggest a means of revising static representation as well.

After the patrons have left the museum, the Attendant moves through the building, closing doors behind him. He enters the room that houses the Biard painting, only now the painting has undergone a fantastic transformation. Julien's reorganization of the images is marked by mobility: the painting itself is inhabited by living human models. The bodies contained (or not) within the frame of the reorganized image breathe and move slightly; "real" bodies have replaced the static and artificially *historicized* images of the Biard painting. In this way, Julien designs a memorial that refuses to impose a static set of meanings. He suggests instead a group of bodies which, while troping on a history of institutionalized bondage, are able still to signify a certain degree of desire and agency within that framework.

This alternative to "the original" is constructed as the Attendant's fantasy. As he walks past the image (the fantasy image is in color and the Attendant is in black-and-white) the models' eyes follow him. The fact that the "fantasy" is in color and the "reality" of the Attendant is in black-and-white is an aesthetic choice bound by a desire to play with traditional notions of the dream/reality binary. By "colorizing" fantasy, Julien isn't subsumed into the Technicolor world of Oz, but rather establishes the primacy of fantasy to the black and gay experience—or at least *this* black, gay experience. The characters in the portrait shift from "the looked at" to the "looking," establishing the ways in which these violently historical images themselves are able to cross even that most sacred of museum codes in this fantasy by rupturing the clear delineation between image and spectator. The subversiveness in this lies in its critique of history's ability to *trap* and *frame*. The fact that this re-presentation of history has dimension and moves, and that the models, in their S/M gear and their gaze toward the spectator, are allowed the desire and sexuality which had been denied them in traditional representations, points to Julien's—and the Attendant's—desire to escape the spatial and temporal confines of dominant history.

The Attendant passes through this room into another, which now houses a second reorganized slave painting. Again, the models are playing out a slave-turned-S/M scene on board what appears to be a slave ship. Two black men stand against the mast and ropes with a white man behind them wielding a cat-o'-nine-tails that echoes the whip in Biard's painting. The fact that in both images the black man is imagined as prone to the white men's positioning indicates the nature of Julien's reinterpretation of the Biard painting, one that acknowledges the previously repressed sexuality in that original. The costuming is not "historical" but S/M, indicating that not only is there pleasure involved, but volition as well. The fantasy allows for "forbidden" sexuality or pleasure, but at this point is unable to sustain a complete reversal (i.e., black sadism, white masochism). In other words, black male pleasure, at this stage in the fantasy sequence, is envisioned as masochistic and is disturbingly bound to the roles suggested by history.

The film allows for these reversals by figuring the Attendant as "curator" to the fantastic images that fill the museum after hours. Not only does the Attendant "imagine" these reconfigurations, but his job is also to check the black and white museum patrons' bags as they enter the museum. It is reasonable to deduce that, since many of the actors "captured" in the S/M scenes are the same actors whose bags are checked earlier, the bags contain costumes appropriate for the creation of the S/M fantasy. The key to this idea is the word "costume," a term that suggests the constructedness of the representation. Julien critiques our notions of art as history, suggesting the artificiality even of the "official" art that hangs on the museum's walls. The Attendant is "in charge" of his own fantasy, and the visitors become submissive to his desires to have this fantasy worked out on the visual level. This idea is provocative in that it suggests the Attendant's agency where, in the traditional museum space, he would be passive to the images surrounding him.

Clad in leather and carrying with him all of the significance of his role in *Looking for Langston*, the "visitor," played by John Wilson, enters the museum with his black leather bag. As he did in the earlier film, Wilson plays an individual fascinated by the black male body, almost to the extent that it becomes another fetish along with his leather and S/M gear. Interestingly, however, his fetishism is problematized by a similar fetishism on the part of the Attendant, who, for arguably different reasons, uses the white body in much the same way as the visitor uses the black body.[4]

The visitor's bag is checked like those of the other visitors, only this time a more intimate exchange of gazes ensues. The film is still in black-and-white, except for the cupidesque angels which circle their heads as they gaze at each other.[5] Because his films deal with multiple "identities" (gay, black, white, S/M) and histories, Julien's angels signify the fluidity of identity, its "unboundedness." The seemingly naïve idealism in this idea is compensated for by Julien's ironic and camp treatment of the angels. They are not bound by theological notions of angel-ness. Rather, in their display of curiosity, they are aligned with the spectator. In both this film and *Looking for Langston*, the angels are usually composed above the "action" of the narrative itself, and are thus spectators to it. Julien seems to be suggesting a spectator who is equally unbound, unanchored by some arbitrary notion of history or identity. Their costuming, which plays on signifiers of S/M sexuality and traditional angel symbolism, is simultaneously "angelic" and "perverse." Wings are kept in place by leather harnesses, and the angels carry bows and arrows or pitchforks, signifying the infliction of pain in the attainment of desire. The bow and arrow/pitchfork also rhymes with the whips in the Biard painting and with Julien's reconfiguration of that painting, suggesting the sadism of history that is being both revised and sexualized.

The angel circling the Attendant's head carries with him the adornments of the traditional cupidesque angel, including the bow and arrow. Circling the visitor's head, however, is a more demonic version of this angel—his costume is black and he is carrying a pitchfork. This seems to be an entrance into the psyches of these individuals and suggests a traditional and romanticized version of fantasy on the part of the Attendant and perhaps a more perverse and sadistic one on the part of the visitor. This also reestablishes the two men's relation to the colonial project imagined in the recreated paintings—the visitor with his pitchfork-wielding angel is the sadist who occupies the dominant position of the oppressor.

The angels resemble, in their circular movement around the characters' heads, the circling carved figures of German clocks. This association with time is supported by the following image of the Attendant's hand holding a gold (like the angels, this timepiece is also in color) pocket watch. As we gaze at the watch we can hear it ticking, and, as the image melts into the image of the museum space itself, a series of clock gongs can be heard. At the first of these gongs, the patrons in the museum begin to leave through the door at the right of the frame. The visitor in leather moves across this emptying space and stares directly into the camera, flirtatiously smiling to the eye behind it—the Attendant's. The construction of this gaze into the apparatus suggests that the following fantasy scene is from the point of view of the Attendant.

We return to the painting that opened the film, only this time in its entirety and framed by a golden and filigreed frame. In this scene Julien directly toys with viewers who have criticized him for being too theory-driven by positioning as the spectator of the painting (who is about to leave because of the chiming clock) his friend and fellow theorist, Stuart Hall.[6] The mu-

The visitor's demonic angel

Angelic perversions

seum patrons are, in fact, all British theoreticians and/or filmmakers. By positioning them as "spectators" of the classical, Julien is not only demonstrating his indebtedness to theory and foregrounding his critical and cinematic community, but is also pointing to the possibility that theorists might be *missing* something occurring at the non-official level of fantasy. The fantasy takes place after hours and in an alternative space. Unlike the permanence implied by the static art hanging on the walls of the museum, the fantasy will presumably be transformed back into the Biard painting again before opening time the next day. The fantasy, we are reminded, is not permanent. In concentrating on the classical and sacred monuments and artifacts of history, and by not entering the alternative spaces of the museum that are envisioned not as the product of history but as the product of fantasy, the theorists, who obediently leave when the exit bell tolls, are not privy to the reorganization of space and history.

While the theorists are able only to occupy the museum during its official hours, there is an entire subculture that exists within the building after hours. In a scene in which the realm of fantasy seemingly enters the space of reality, a gloved hand begins stroking a whip emanating from the visitor's bag. In another part of the museum, a black female employee (the Conservator, as she is titled in the credits) dusts a frame as if checking it for fingerprints. Her dusting is interrupted and she is startled by the loud crack of a whip that echoes through the building. She looks up and walks toward the sound.

The next sequence is a direct reference to an earlier fantasy sequence of the reorganized slave scenes. In a previously unexamined room in the museum hang two drawings by Tom of Finland depicting fantastic images of gay sexuality, in front of which the now partially disrobed, S/M and leather-clad visitor is whipping the Attendant.[7] Not unlike the fantasy of the Attendant himself, Finland's work poses interesting questions about gay desire. It stands apart from the paintings adorning the walls of the rest of the museum in its status as "low" or "common" art; in fact, his work is often referred to as "cartooning." Finland's paintings are on the margins of classical art, as well as on the margins of accepted sexual behavior (much like the Attendant and the visitor's activities taking place in front of them); they are uncanny precisely because they represent the familiar (art or sexuality) in what may be an unfamiliar way. In this way, Finland's work is similar to Julien's. As in the original painting as well as the reorganized painting, the visitor's whip is stiff and immobile in the air. The Conservator listens at the door and the soundtrack switches to a porn loop complete with heavy breathing and "more, oh yeah, feels good."

With the possible exception of the film's operatic moments, this "dialogue" is the only dialogue in the film. The fact that these utterances are not pro-filmic and are easily traceable to the gay porn industry calls attention to yet another type of representation. Without showing pornographic images, Julien has suggested their influence on the fantasy life of the Attendant and

his visitor by replacing their utterances with those of the porn film. The scene then undergoes a reversal in which the Attendant whips the white visitor and, again, the whip is frozen in mid-air. This reversal is critical in that the historical positions of captor and captive have been altered, if only to suggest the arbitrariness of the power of representation. Julien raises the possibility that pornography and the performance of violent (S/M) sexuality is linked to and can, in fact, change the meaning of real, painful colonial histories. These changes, however, are temporary and the viewer is reminded that fantasy is limited and limiting in its liberating capacity.

This scene establishes a clear-cut gender-based distinction as to who can take part in this dialogue and who can "see" it. The Conservator is drawn by the sound of a cracking whip, following that sound to the closed door behind which the men are engaged in fantasy. She listens at the door and leaves, smiling curiously (in both senses of the word). The fact that she is denied access to the visual aspect of the fantasy is interesting in relation to the role that women play in the making of and reorganization of history. She can be seen as "not in" on the fantasy but certainly aware of its taking place: an aural spectator, perceiving history but not making it.

It is, of course, difficult to determine whether Julien is, in the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of this character, critiquing or reifying traditional gender roles—she is, after all, cleaning the museum and is thus aligned with domesticity and servitude. If this woman is seen as the "conservator"—as preserving this institution of misrepresentation—then she is, in Julien's text, seen as perpetuating these very images. In a film oeuvre which is largely male-based, the inclusion of a female in the narrative requires our attention. At least in this film, the category of woman remains only mysterious. Her mystique surpasses that of the men involved, possibly only because of the fact that, through the use of fantasy, we have stepped into the two male protagonists' psyches and understand something about them which remains shrouded to her. Ultimately, it is the male protagonists who are envisioned as perverting history, while the Conservator is seen as preserving it.

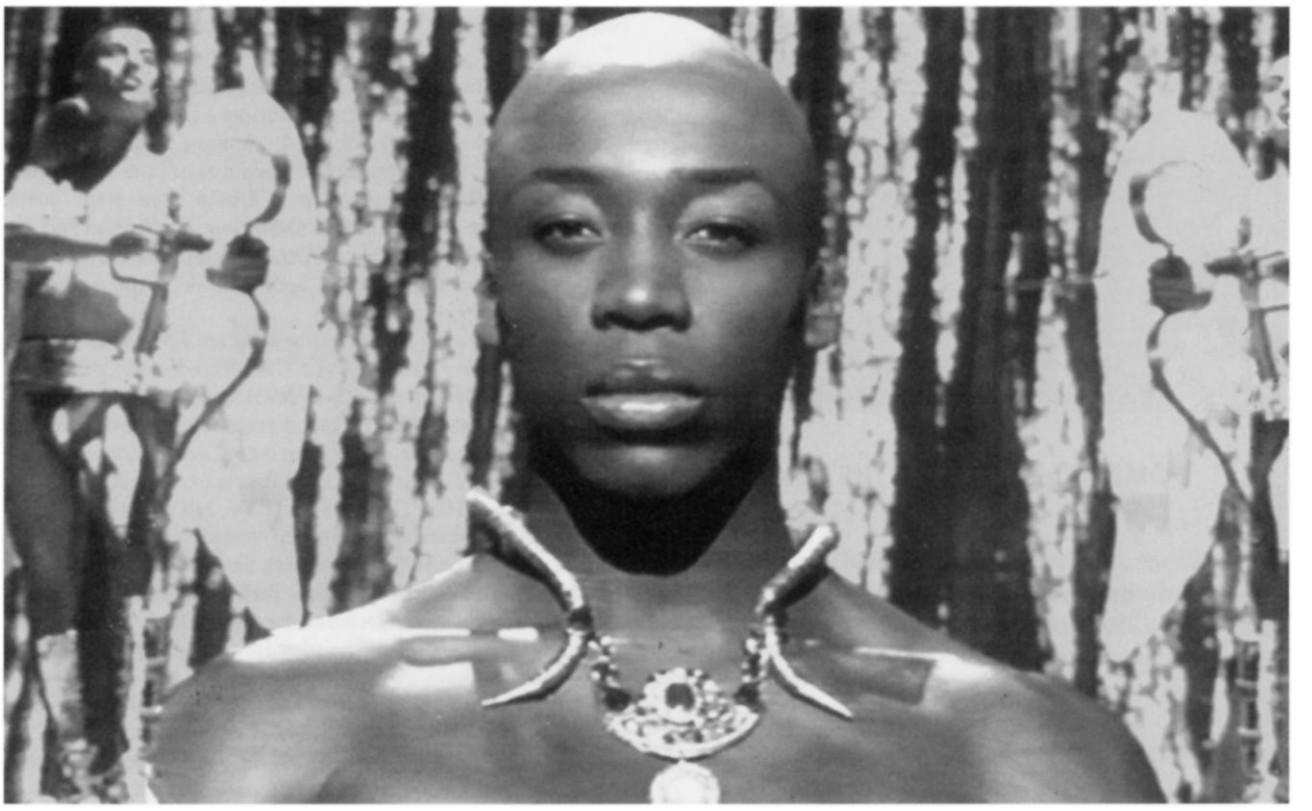
The Attendant's problematic positioning of womanhood is also addressed early in the film in an opera house, a space that seems totally separate from that of the museum. From a box in the balcony, the actor who plays the Attendant, now wearing a tuxedo, sings "Dido's Lament."[8] The reversals occur here not only in terms of race and gender (Dido was a female Greek mythological character and her lament is traditionally sung by a woman) but, more crucially, in terms of space. The singing Attendant is "performing" from a space in the theater designated for the spectator.

On the actual stage a nearly motionless group stands in an array of "vogue" poses, looking ridiculously glamorous in their gold speedos and makeup. The entire sequence is shot in black-and-white, but the sheen of the costumes suggests gold and later scenes prove this suggestion. A shirtless, bald black man stands at the front of the group, arms raised in cruciform. Despite the glamorization of the costumes, they rhyme with stereotypical images of Africans: the man at the front is wearing a gold and jeweled simulation of the mythic toothed necklace. A woman in a black dress (the only female character in the film besides the Conservator) claps from a seat above the orchestra pit, raising questions of address: Just who (or what) is being applauded here?

This scene establishes a convolution of traditional theatrical spectatorial positionings. The stage inhabitants are given relatively little film space as opposed to the singing Attendant, who, from his position in the balcony, has assumed the space of the angels who will later enter the film. This reversal redirects attention from the stage toward the Attendant, and his vocalizations (the only pro-filmic vocalizations in the film) further heighten this redirective process. But even more crucially, the soundtrack reinforces that the film *remembers* history. From the space of the spectator, the Attendant "performs" a song that begs his listeners not to overlook his position. The repeated refrain of the piece is "Remember me, remember me."

The film ends with a montage of previous images culminating in the tuxedoed Attendant singing Dido's lament in black-and-white. On stage, the man previously in cruciform is surrounded by his entourage in various poses. The white visitor is now a spectator of this "performance" and is also in a tuxedo. He is still wearing his leather gloves, touching his eye as if crying in response to the aria. This miming becomes performative in its own right, and his apparent emotions are only representative of what could be considered a traditional response to the aria's climax. His position as spectator, then, is active precisely because he is not applauding but rather performing a hyper-emotional response. There is then a close-up of the singing Attendant as he closes his song with the words "Don't forget my fate," prior to bowing to his implied audience. The woman dressed in black again applauds, and the credits roll.

The applauding woman seems again to be positioned somewhere outside the active and male roles



Performance glamour

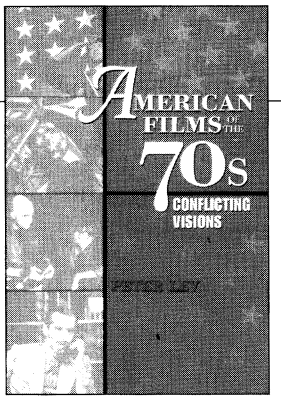
in the film. The men on stage in this scene, presumably the same men who have been imagined as recreating history in the reconfigured paintings, are given voice by the Attendant's operatic singing. Ultimately their activity, along with the Attendant's and the visitor's relationship, aligns the woman with the role of the passive and (unseeing) spectator. In the same way as the Conservator is only allowed to listen at the door, the woman in the balcony is only allowed to "see" in the traditional arena of the theater. She is a token spectator, seeing only this acknowledged performance; the Conservator is little more than an evicted spectator.

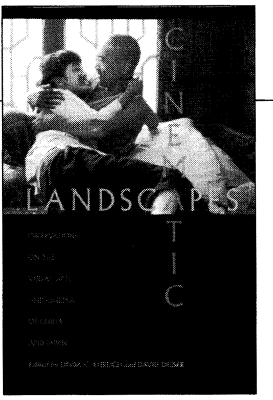
The Attendant has, until recently, remained largely invisible in both public spaces and critical discourse (bell hooks writes about it in *Reel to Real*, as does Gen Doy in *Black Visual Culture*). It is, however, a film critically engaged with questions of visibility. Julien posits that fantasy is a means by which traditional notions of history may be re-*visioned*. But the fantasies posited by Julien are not "easy," nor are they all-inclusive. There is, even in the revisionary realm of fantasy, a significant level of ambiguity and exclusivity. Julien problematically suggests a fantasy space where woman and, less problematically, theory are uninvited. Contained within this idea, however, is the more easily negotiated idea that fantasy occurs individually, that it is constructed, and that it is, by its very nature, exclusive. This subjective understanding of fantasy and its relationship to history is precisely what was applauded in Julien's earlier and more frequently discussed *Looking for Langston*. In *The Attendant*, the superimposition of queer sexuality upon colonial representations of the black subject is provocative because Julien refuses to be subject to tradition. Rather, in subjecting tradition to his own postmodern and avant-garde inventions, he implies no less than the ultimate instability of history.

Since *The Attendant*, Julien has produced a follow-up or companion piece, *Three* (1999), envisioned as a response to bell hooks's article on the film. His most recent work continues to push the political and formal limits of cinema. *The Long Road to Mazatlan*, a three-screen installation project, provocatively utilizes the multi-screen format as it traces the desire of two young men dressed in a slightly hyperbolized version of the traditional Vaquero. Since 1995, Julien has taught both film and theory; he is currently teaching at Harvard.

Devin Orgeron recently earned his Ph.D. at the University of Maryland, where he teaches film and literature.

Thanks to Isaac Julien for generously providing the photos.





AMERICAN FILMS OF THE 70s

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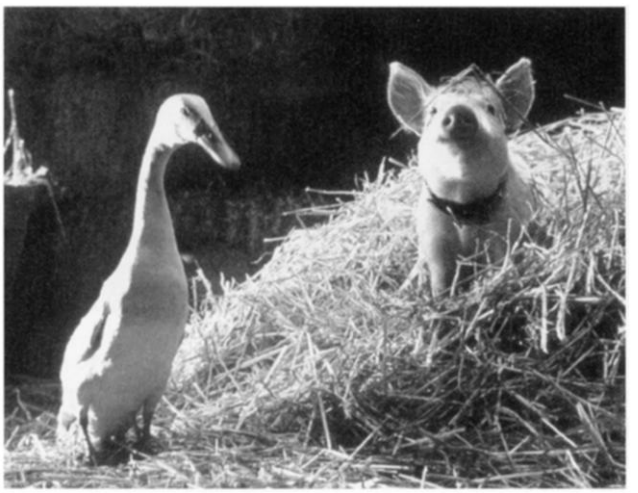
Notes

1. The most important of these articles might be Isaac Julien & Kobena Mercer's "Introduction—De Margin and De Center," *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 2–10, a theoretically rich essay that demonstrates the intellectual rigor of the movement as a whole. See also Judith Williamson, "Two Kinds of Otherness: Black Film and the Avant-Garde," *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 106–12, and Amy Taubin, "Soul to Soul," *Sight and Sound* (August 1991), pp. 14–19.
2. His pre-*Looking for Langston* films are *Territories* (1985), *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986), co-directed with Maureen Blackwood, and *This Is Not An Aids Advertisement* (1988). Since 1988 he has directed *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), his only feature film to date, *The Attendant* (1992), *The Darker Side of Black* (1993), and *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1996). Since 1996, Julien has been working on film installation projects, mainly commissioned by art museums and foundations in the U.K. and the U.S.
3. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Signet, 1991). In Morrison's popular novel, characters discuss their "re-memory" of events. This linguistic play foregrounds the "re-membering" subject's role in the process of personal, historical revision. Julien practices, cinematically, the same revisionist approach to history.
4. In *Diary of a Young Soul Rebel*, co-authored with Colin MacCabe, with screenplay by Paul Hallman and Derrick Saldaan McClintock (London: BFI Publishing, 1991), Julien offers the following in a discussion of black/white desire/sexuality: "In *Looking for Langston* (1989), as in *Young Soul Rebels*, I try to re-politicize the gaze of black-and-white subjects. It is obvious to say that in both these films I am interested in the way that white males project their (repressed) sexuality onto blacks, constructing them in fantasy as a sexual fetish. It is the gaze that makes visible that which remains unseen, and it is the business of 'memory' (versus history) and the exploration of racial and sexual differences in the cinema for the 'other' that propels me to make films" (67).
5. The angels also recall a chorus from *Dido and Aeneas*, "with drooping wings ye Cupids come." This opera is also the film's soundtrack when the narrative locates itself in the "other" space of the opera house.
6. Hall is in black-and-white while the painting is either in very faded color or sepia tone.
7. Though the Tom of Finland images themselves are hard to analyze because of their distance from the eye of the camera (they are at the back of the room and are placed on either side of the central figures of the scene), Finland's work itself is famous for its "fantasy" quality and often racist depictions. These images appear to depict, respectively from left to right, a group of men in an exchange of erotic "pick-up" gazes and an anal penetration fantasy in which the penetrator's penis is imagined to be about two feet long.
8. The soundtrack is arranged by Jimmy Sommerville, formerly of the openly gay and marginally controversial 80s British pop group *Bronski Beat*. Sommerville also makes an appearance in *Looking for Langston* as an angel, not unlike the angels in this film. This is precisely the type of intertextuality that is of interest here and it is a reference not to theory or the avant-garde but to pop music/culture.

Christopher Kelly

Toys in the Attic

The Unsung Pleasures (and Terrors) of *Babe: Pig in the City* and *Small Soldiers*



Babe: Pig in the City: Ferdinand tries to talk Babe, his "lucky pig," out of going to a faraway city.

Small Soldiers: Alan Abernathy (Gregory Smith) allies himself with the Gorgonites.

Fans of children's cinema have had little to complain about in recent years, with such resonant, thoughtful works as *Into the West, A Little Princess, The Secret Garden,* and *Fly Away Home* arriving in theaters at a steady clip. Unless, of course, one bemoans how few people have actually seen these films. Or how few critics are writing about them. Why the lack of interest? Unfortunately, the answer isn't terribly complicated. The target kid audience for these movies, ever eager for the newer, cooler, and trendier, isn't interested in aligning itself with a work widely regarded as a "loser," and so even on home video they do little more than collect dust. And as for the critics . . . they may have championed them during their initial runs, but rarely do they deem children's cinema worthy of further analysis or scholarship. In other words, you can dispatch all of these unfortunate titles—and so many others, like *The Borrowers*, *Shiloh*, or *The Iron Giant*—straight to the forgotten movie scrap heap. File them under: "Movies No One Could Be Bothered With."

But if the commercial failures of films like *Into the West* and *Fly Away Home* were frustrating, the fates that befell *Babe: Pig in the City* and *Small Soldiers* were downright maddening, because in these cases even the critics abandoned ship. As a result, two of the most vibrant, daring, and startlingly original children's films ever seen have gone down in the annals of popular culture as turkeys. *Babe 2*, in postproduction well into the 11th hour before its release (because, the rumor mill reported, its producers were desperately trying to "lighten" the dark and cynical monstrosity they had on their hands), was greeted by bloodthirsty reviews that seemed all too eager to corroborate the bad buzz: "A desperate, pathetic mess . . . that depicts cruelty to animals in the name of slapstick comedy" (*San Francisco Chronicle*); "Had 'Pig in the City' been made first, it by no means

Film Quarterly, Vol. no. 53, Issue no. 4, pages 41-46. ISSN: 0015-1386. © 2000 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

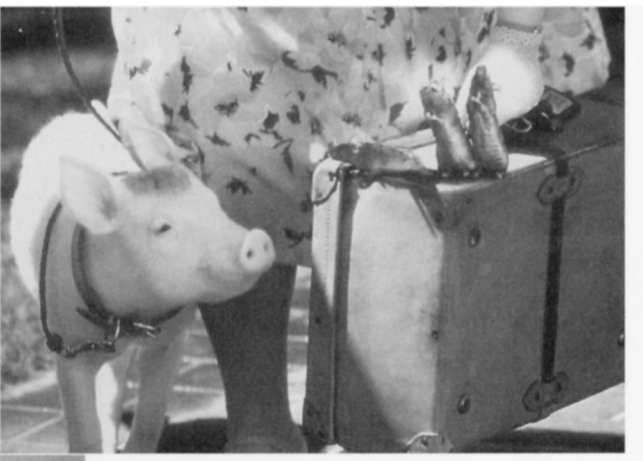
Left: After winning the National Sheep-dog Trials, Babe and Farmer Hoggett return to a proud Mrs. Hoggett.

Below : Babe meets Easy, Zootie, and Bob.

could have prompted a sequel of its own" (*New York Times*). The responses to *Small Soldiers*, Joe Dante's first film since the equally misunderstood *Matinee,* weren't much friendlier: "A family picture on the outside, and a mean violent action picture on the inside" (Roger Ebert); "Too absurd to be frightening and too creepy for lighthearted fun" (*New York Times* again). Both movies eventually found their champions (*Babe 2* was the number one film on Gene Siskel's 1998 ten best list, *Small Soldiers* was number four on Jonathan Rosenbaum's), but alas, it was too little, and much too late. Audiences had avoided both en masse, and rapidly moved on to the next big thing.

One more frustration: Just look at the product they moved on to. The Disney-style (but hardly Disney exclusive) mega-musical (*The Prince of Egypt, Mulan*); the violent and frenzied *Home Alone*-style action comedy (*Mouse Hunt, Dr. Doolittle*); worst (and, naturally, most popular) of all, the one-liner-heavy cartoon adventure (*Antz, A Bug's Life*). What links all of these films is the way in which they use the twin modes of millennial cinematic expression—technological razzmatazz and ironic distance—in order to avoid having to concentrate on plot, character, or recognizable emotion. *Mouse Hunt*, for instance, offers a stunning marriage of art direction (a painstakingly detailed run-down old mansion) and choreography (in the form of one physics-defying slapstick stunt after another), but for characters we get two greedy brothers with less psychological density and moral purpose than Wile E. Coyote on his least interesting day. *Antz* serves up state-of-the-art computer animation with a soulless screenplay notable only for its unvarying stream of pop-culture savvy "Get it?" gags. (A neurotic ant voiced by Woody Allen whines to his bug psychiatrist, "Handling dirt is not my idea of a rewarding career.") And, to make matters worse, so many critics respond in kind, praising the in-jokes or the fancy effects for the diversion they provide parents who might otherwise be bored. The end result: kids come to expect (and even welcome) more of the same; serious filmgoers can't be convinced that some of these kid's films are anything different—and two near-masterpieces wither and perish on our ever-attenuating cultural vine.

To be fair, I should state right off the bat that *Babe 2* is hardly a model of quietude and simplicity; following up Chris Noonan's multi-Oscar nominated *Babe*, the director, George Miller, rarely shies away from high-priced special effects, or visual pastiche, or goofy pop-culture gags (pay particular attention to the pit bull who sounds like Vito Corleone's long-lost pet). But he uses all of these things with purpose and imagination, and it fast becomes apparent how proudly iconoclastic and original the world of *Babe 2* truly is. As with the glistening, golden-hued urban fantasy skyline that Babe periodically looks out upon throughout the film—a jumbled-up, squeezed together amalgamation of the world's most famous buildings and landmarks, including, among numerous others, the World Trade Center, the Hollywood sign, and the Eiffel Tower—Miller seeks to create something sublimely new by patching together material from many differ-



Below: Babe encounters the city animals.

Right: Babe, Mrs. Hoggett, and three stowaway mice

ent sources. And so Mrs. Hoggett's first trip into the City—a teeming, sweltering wasteland of multi-pierced and tattooed punks—may bring to mind Miller's own *Mad Max* films, just as the gorgeously languid fire that breaks out during a circus performance at a children's hospital may evoke *Zero for Conduct* and *La Strada*. But in Miller's able hands these visual quotes take on a striking new resonance. We find ourselves alive to a distinctly animal's-eye view of things. The hotel for strays in which much of the film's action takes place, for instance, is a dilapidated, dimly lit edifice that looks as if it is about to spill over into the canal it's set against; it's also a grander, stranger, infinitely kookier and creepier version of those sprawling orphanages Charles Dickens (and David Lean) once dreamed up. Later, a breathlessly harried, Southern-accented poodle saunters onto the scene, and as we take in her perfectly coifed, powder-puff pink form we realize that if Tennessee Williams had ever decided to write about the doomed Southern Gothic romanticism of female dogs this creature would have been his muse. Miller's whimsical strategy in *Babe 2* seems to be to replay the masterworks of film (and literary) history as they might have been written, directed, and performed by a troupe of animals. His grand and funny triumph is to make that world seem both far more lived-in and far more beautiful than our own.

Yet I don't want to overstate the astonishing visual ambition of the film. Too many viewers have been scared away by the widespread mischaracterization that *Babe 2* is some kind of esoteric art film; besides, Miller's real achievements lie elsewhere—with the richly textured characters and generously told story, and in the film's daring, difficult, unashamedly *mature* thematic landscape. *Babe 2*, it turns out, is that rare sequel about the complications of a post-happily-ever-after existence. At the start of the film, Babe, recently returned from his triumph at the National Sheep Dog competition, accidentally sends Farmer Hoggett (James Cromwell) plummeting down a well. Suddenly, a pig who could do no wrong can't seem to get anything right, and Babe will spend the rest of the movie struggling to escape the long shadow of failure. He's succeeded once, and everyone expects him to succeed again. Can he live up to the expectations? Into the city he journeys, hoping to secure with Mrs. Hoggett (Magda Szubanksi) the money to prevent foreclosure on the farm. But from this swift, almost clinically unsentimental beginning, only one thing is certain: If Babe wants victory a second time around he's going to have to *work* for it.

And he's also going to have to square off against a rough-and-tumble group of antagonists: a gonzo gang of funny-sad supporting animal characters, each of whom is busy fighting his or her own epic battle against expectations and limitations. Round 1, at the animal hotel, is opposite a rambunctious young monkey out to steal Babe's and Mrs. Hoggett's luggage. Desperate not to lose control of this rapidly free-falling situation, the pig follows the monkey to his room . . . and discovers an entire family of beasts. The female chimp, wig and cocktail dress askew, confusion registering on her face; her husband, in T-shirt and suspenders, immediately

hostile towards this new visitor; the younger brother, right away ready to spar; and the elder statesman orangutan, suited up with nowhere to go, bitterly scornful of his "drooling imbecile" roommates and the "deeply unattractive mud-lover" pig. Their names, it turns out, are Zootie, Bob, Easy, and Theolonius, and together they seem to form a jazz quartet that has long since lost its music. In each of their scenes, Miller holds the camera on them for what seems like ages, giving the viewer ample time to consider the melancholy that fills their voices and the dread that paralyzes their faces. "No guarantees, my little porkpie," muses Zootie—and she's hit the nail right on the head. Resignation is all these primates have left to cling to.

What's brought on the blues? Years of captivity, perhaps. It turns out that the chimps are the main attraction in a children's circus presided over by their owner, Fugly Floom (Mickey Rooney), a mumbling old man whose physical stockiness and zonked-out emotional remoteness link him deeply to his pets. (Another of *Babe 2*'s perfectly subtle pop-culture references: the film picks up and expands upon the great dogs-being-walked-by-their-identical-looking-owners sequence in Disney's *101 Dalmatians*.) When we watch them perform in the circus, their sadness becomes palpable. Theolonius, particularly, stands silently, going through the motions. Indeed, these creatures' resentment of Babe soon becomes quite understandable: He's an outsider, and his very presence reminds them of what lurks beyond, in whatever place they've been unable—or are too scared—to find on their own.

Every year one of the popular entertainment magazines compiles a tongue-in-cheek list of the year's best animal performances (Babe himself topped many of those lists in 1995). But this time there's no joke. These are real performances—physically dexterous, ripely emotional, completely thought out and carried through. Miller affords his animals all of the tools and tricks (monologues, close-ups, elaborate costumes and makeup) normally reserved for human actors. And the animals deliver—in flickering facial nuances, longing glances, emotionally charged frowns or smiles. Miller reaches for real psychological depth here; he shows us an entire animal universe in struggle: for redemption (Babe), for food and shelter (the many stray cats and dogs who populate the city), but mostly for dignity (watch as Theolonius struggles to dress himself before joining the other animals in escaping from the pound).

Miller's commercial doom may very well have been his unwillingness to soft-pedal these struggles. A raid of the hotel by animal control, for instance, produces real terror; the animals are trapped in nets and hauled away in trucks, and no amount of bumbling slapstick can mitigate the dread we feel for them. An earlier sequence has the chimps leading Babe into a "No Trespassing" area guarded by a ferocious pit bull. Some viewers may be shocked at how willfully malicious their behavior is, but Miller isn't interested in niceties. In the brutal, breakneck chase between dog and pig that follows, he reduces his take-no-prisoners approach to simple terms. Babe, gasping for breath, all but resigned to his fate as dinner, asks him, "Why?" The dog's heartlessly matter-of-fact, multi-referential, and pop-culture-savvy response: "It's in my nature."

And yet, in the end, Miller could never be accused of pessimism. He shows us the exacting *cost* of triumph, but he also shows us why it's worth every penny. And he shows us that it's possible, however *impossible* it might seem, to transcend one's own nature. The tables of the chase do eventually turn. Babe winds up saving the dog from death by hanging, and, in the film's funniest sequence, the two of them unite to feed all of the hungry animals in the city. The pit bull's terse instructions to the animals as they each receive their single jelly bean ration? "Thank the pig." And indeed, even the hungriest, most resentful, least innately appreciative creature can be persuaded to do just that. If that persuasion is sometimes through force, and if those thank-yous are hardly always sincere, so be it. Miller is merely displaying the deeply wise, sweetly twisted essence of his distinctly no-nonsense vision. Which is to say: Enjoy the good will, but let's not forget it's a dog-eat-dog world out there.

After having railed against pop-culture "Get-it?" jokes and irony for irony's sake, I run the risk of sounding foolish by now turning around and praising *Small Soldiers*. A mixture (like *Babe 2*) of live action and computer animation, *Small Soldiers* imagines what might happen if a group of plastic toys were errantly implanted with computer chips that enabled them to wage war against a suburban community. It should probably come as no surprise that Joe Dante, one of contemporary cinema's great pranksters (remember Leonard Maltin meeting his doom in *Gremlins 2* as he delivers a negative review of the first *Gremlins* film), is behind all of this. And, indeed, Dante lets loose with one brilliantly conceived, gleefully ironic "toy" gag after another: General Chip Hazard (voiced by Tommy Lee Jones), in full toy battle gear, marching before an oversize jigsaw puzzle of an American flag and delivering a deliciously twisted Patton-esque speech ("Damn the torpedoes or give me death!"); an assault by remote-controlled toy helicopters, choreographed à la *Apocalypse Now* to Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"; the soldiers em-

Above: Teen heroes Christy Fimple (Kirsten Dunst) and Alan Abernathy.

Above right: Sworn enemies, Archer and Major Chip Hazard meet face-to-face.

Right: Hazard leads the Commando Elite.

ploying "psychological warfare" on the humans by playing a Spice Girls song at full blast; or an off-camera television talk show on which the guest tells his host, "We're opening [the movie] all over the country, and then the following weekend just New York and L.A."

But if I defend the irony in *Small Soldiers*, it's in the same way that I defend the irony in *The Player* or "The Simpsons"—as irony that expresses an expansive satiric vision. Dante's goal here is to portray a contemporary American society on the verge of a popular culture overdose. He quickly sets up two opposing sets of toys, and he cleverly uses pop distinctions to tell them apart: the peaceful, sad-voiced Gorgonites are all uniquely designed variations on monsters (Quasimodo, Frankenstein) from old Hollywood horror pictures, while the bellicose soldiers are all square-jawed, big-muscled Rambo knockoffs. But the problem, as Dante sees it, is that we're no longer able to distinguish good from bad. On television, for instance, the crass pyrotechnics of professional wrestling are just one click away from the beauty and poetry and weirdness of *It Came from Outer Space*, and—at least to Gorgonite eyes—both seem to display an equal degree of verisimilitude. The toys, too, might as well all be the same, because, by programming them as mortal enemies, the manufacturers have made it so that you can't really buy the good without buying the bad. In short, the pop glut has infected us all, and there's no escape from it. Yes, we can try to exhibit good taste (as the teenage heroes in the film do, by endorsing Led Zeppelin music and "The X-Files"), but anyone who thinks the more high-tech philistines aren't winning the war is only fooling himself. (The depressing punch line to the satire is, of course, that *Small Soldiers* fell victim to the very marketplace follies it warns against, possibly because DreamWorks carelessly marketed it like every other whiz-bang kiddie action flick out there.)

And yet, unlike, say, Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers, Small Soldiers* is not the kind of high-minded satire that heedlessly exploits the very conditions it mocks. Instead, Dante exploits those conditions *with* heed. He generates real and unabashed pleasure from the junk. Take, for instance, the film's most bravura sequence, in which the toy soldiers implant the warmongering computer chips into a group of "Gwendy" dolls. Transformed into a demonic girl gang of grostesqueries (complete with bulging eyes, bald pates, and screws and stitching protruding from all over), they seductively prance around the bedroom spouting stream-of-conscious trendy-isms ("She's gone postal," "That haircut is so five minutes ago," "Don't hate me because

I'm beautiful") and launching a vicious attack against their teenage girl owner. That these maniacal Courtney-Love-cum-Barbie-Beautiful toys are capable of doing major damage is one point the director is trying to put across; but that these are also gorgeously weird, deliciously menacing creations (the kind only possible in an overstuffed, hyperpop universe) is most certainly another. Dante makes the pranksterism cut both ways here, and it proves to be his smartest move. He recognizes the threat being posed to our fun, but he refuses to empower that threat by treating it seriously. Or, to put it in explicitly militaristic terms: He wins the war by defeating his enemies at their own game.

Will children get any of this? Probably not, but I don't want to sell the kid's movie appeal of *Small Soldiers* short. Dante understands that children can respond to the rudeness, excitement, and anarchy of the satire, even if they aren't getting all the jokes. And he's also made certain that they respond to the *excitement* of the film by focusing, in sublimely child-like fashion, almost entirely on visceral and kinetic pleasure. Indeed, like a child lost to the world in his own after-school fantasies, Dante has created a completely pure "play" universe, a film that refuses to abide by any adult (or Hollywood) rules of logic or propriety. A toy soldier chases and then desperately tries to scale a live-action moving bicycle as it speeds down the street; the soldiers bind and gag the heroine's younger brother and then lock him up in the closet; in the final battle sequence, they deliriously launch flaming tennis balls through a family's living room windows, only to have the balls shot right back at them by a mom with a fierce backhand. Dante skirts along ecstatically *and* infectiously; he seems determined that every frame of his movie explode in a burst of rowdy excitement. And whereas other directors might have shaped the same material into a treacly *E.T.*-like ode to childhood imagination, Dante's rambunctiousness allows *Small Soldiers* to become something far more practical (and funny): an owner's manual for children on how to use imagination *as a weapon.*

The Gorgonites (and the suburbanites), of course, ultimately win the war, but Dante, like George Miller, is ultimately far more concerned with the dark side of victory. (The erstwhile bound-and-gagged boy actually says to his father, "You know my birthday? I want clothes.") Will these pint-sized yahoo fighting machines return to do battle again? The film's numerous final-scene hints certainly suggest as much. But for once even the setup for a sequel (perhaps the most cynical of all kid's movie tactics) makes genuine thematic sense, because *Small Soldiers* seems to take place entirely within the amorphous space inside a child's mind that can produce glory for the good guys one afternoon and mass destruction for them the next. Indeed, if I dwell so much on the notion of play, it's because the film really does captures the danger children explore when they play with toy figures: the weirdness, the violence, the make-it-up-as-you-go-along outlandishness. And because Dante, triumphantly, has developed an aesthetic from this kind of play: one that is deeply visceral, wickedly funny, and damn near out of control, but perfectly capable of giving parents (in the audience *and* in Hollywood) just the happy face required in order to quell any suspicions of subversion.

Are these films, as so many critics have charged, too dark for children? Perhaps there is no one answer to this question. No, these are not innocent works, but children are hardly innocent creatures. And while some kids are certainly going to be frightened by them and turned off, others will be frightened and turned on, just as different kids respond differently to works like *Bambi, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the Brothers Grimm fairy tales, or J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books.

The real problem, as I suggested before, ultimately seems to have been with what these films *aren't* instead of what they are. It's interesting that *Babe 2* and *Small Soldiers* should have come exactly three years after the original *Babe* and *Toy Story*—another pair of glorious children's films about, as things would have it, a talking pig and talking toys. But if *Babe* and *Toy Story* in many ways represent the apotheosis of children's cinema, combining, as they did, cutting-edge technology, fully realized characters, and a thoroughly infectious sweet-spiritedness that hasn't quite been matched since, their success carries with it the very same oppressiveness that the success of the recent lot of junk kiddie flicks does. In other words, they make the less conventional children's films look bad. To be sure, George Miller and Joe Dante have produced the darker, more troublesome cousins to *Babe* and *Toy Story*, and perhaps viewers expecting something more polite and earnest could be forgiven for their confused reactions. But sometimes the naughtier works are also the infinitely more mature ones—the ones more touched by the gravity and hazardousness of real life, more in tune with the menace that informs (defines) both film history and children's literary history, more alive to the *expressive* abilities of technological innovation. File them under: "The Ones We Let Get Away."

Christopher Kelly has written about film and popular culture for *Premiere, Film Comment, Salon,* and other publications.

Reviews

Buena Vista Social Club

Director: Wim Wenders. Cinematographers: Joerg Widner, Robby Mueller. Artisan Entertainment.

Cachao . . . Como Su Ritmo No Hay Dos

Director: Andy García. Cinematographer: Al "Tiko" Pavoni. Cineson Productions/Atlantico Films.

Buena Vista Social Club: Making music

Cuban music is in the air again, wafting into the North American consciousness as it has at regular intervals since the end of the last century, when the rhythm of the *habanera* first made its way to these shores and influenced New Orleans musicians like Jelly Roll Morton. What Morton called "the Spanish tinge"—an essential component of real jazz, according to him—was thus originally a Cuban import, albeit an unacknowledged one, as has so often been the case with things Cuban in this country. In recent years, however, we have seen some notable efforts to correct our vagueness about Cuba's cultural heritage and to remind us of what we perhaps once knew and have forgotten about its relationship to our own. Among the best of them are these two fine documentaries, both of which are closely related to important recording projects and concerts. At the same time, and from very different perspectives, these films succeed in making complex statements that surpass their apparent goal of providing a cinematic record of some notable musical events.

Of the two, Andy García's portrait of Israel López ("Cachao") comes closest to being a traditional concert film, drawing the bulk of its footage from rehearsals and from a 1992 concert held in Miami in honor of the great bassist and composer, who is, for all of his humility, one of the most important living figures in Cuban music. A former child prodigy who hails from a family that includes over 40 bass players (it is a poignant commentary on the divisiveness of Cuban history that his counterpart in *Buena Vista Social Club* is his own nephew, "Cachaíto," a highly respected bassist on the island), he made his first significant contribution in the late 1930s as a member of the celebrated *danzón* orchestra *Antonio Arcaño y Sus Maravillas*, when he added driving, syncopated figures to the relatively sedate, European-influenced form of the *danzón*, anticipating the mambo and actually authoring a piece by that name with his brother Orestes. In the late 50s, he was responsible for another outstanding innovation when he gathered together some of the leading musicians in Havana to record several albums of jam sessions known as *descargas* (literally "discharges," with the sense of unloading or unburdening oneself), which established a uniquely Cuban brand of improvised music comparable to North American jazz. The twofold nature of Cachao's personal legacy was emphasized in the concert and is echoed by Andy García's film, which captures many beautifully executed performances of *danzones* and *descargas*, featuring some of the most gifted exponents of Latin music in the United States. More generally, the film—and even more so, the two albums that came out of the project (*Master Sessions*, volumes I and II)—offers a splendidly instructive panorama of Cuban musical genres, from the elegant *danzas* of Ignacio Cervantes and Ernesto Lecuona to the major African-influenced forms like the *son*, the *conga*, the *guaracha*, and the type of traditional *rumba* known as the *yambú*.

Yet the motives for this effort of instruction are profound and carry the film beyond the usual territory of a music documentary. As Cachao says more than once onscreen and even in the lyrics of his music ("El Son No Ha Muerto"), the important thing is to maintain the tradition. This is, of course, not just simple aesthetic conservatism. In this case music, and cultural tradition generally, is a bulwark against the indignities and ironies of exile, which, on the one hand, have forced this extraordinary musician to earn his living for many years by playing weddings and christenings and, on the other, have seen the film's director become a famous actor in the English-speaking world. Rich or poor, Cuban-Americans are beset by the problem of

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identity and the desire to preserve some sense of imaginative connection to a country from which they have been absent for so long, and it is one of the strengths of Andy García's film that it communicates the force of this desire without falling into strident political posturing. Indeed, one of the few overtly political gestures that the filmmaker allows himself takes the form of a reading of García Lorca's great poem "Son de Negros en Cuba" ("When the full moon rises/ I'll go to Santiago") against a swelling musical accompaniment, as if to affirm that here politics will speak only in the voice of art (although his reading of the poem on *Master Sessions*, volume I, is given a more aggressively personal turn when he substitutes the name of his family's hometown, Bejucal, for Santiago de Cuba).

More subtle but even more suggestive are the discussion sequences, a number of which include the well-known Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante, whose knowledge of music and trademark puns are also on display in his liner notes for the two albums. These fragments of conversation are occasionally accompanied by a discreet, carefully edited soundtrack of musical allusions, the audio equivalent of scholarly footnotes, illustrating, for example, a passage in George Gershwin's *Cuban Overture* and then comparing the famous *son*, "Echale Salsita," that it quotes—all by way of enriching an anecdote from Cabrera Infante about how the author of the piece, Ignacio Piñeiro, was once surprised to hear fragments of his own melody in Gershwin's work. While the detailed presentation aims to set the record straight and to recover a piece of the Cuban past, which is always in danger of being lost or absorbed into the North American context, the opposite experience is on record here as well. In another discussion, the brilliant clarinetist and alto saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera explains that he became fully aware of the accomplishments of Cuban musicians only *after* he came to the United States; as he puts it, he "discovered the greatness of Cuban music on the banks of the Hudson River." Such a moment conveys, with fine understatement, the exile's peculiarly intense passion for the culture of his homeland and the especially lustrous beauty that it acquires in foreign surroundings.

Whereas the emphasis of *Cachao . . . Como Su Ritmo No Hay Dos* is on the role of traditional Cuban culture in the experience of exile, the underlying subject of Wim Wenders' *Buena Vista Social Club* is the continuing fascination that Cuba and the United States have for each other even after decades of political strife, a fascination that is experienced as equal parts dream and memory on both sides. The ostensible concern of the film is the unexpected success enjoyed by a group of Cuban musicians, most of them in their seventies and eighties, in a recording project initiated by the British producer Nick Gold together with the American guitarist and folk music specialist Ry Cooder. That project now includes more than half a dozen albums, beginning with the Grammy-winning disk from which the film takes its title, and is largely responsible for the current wave of interest in Cuban music. As in Andy García's film, there are interviews with all of the major players in this unlikely drama, and concert footage from their appearances in Amsterdam and New York is intercut with studio scenes shot during the recording of a solo album by Ibrahim Ferrer, the extraordinary 71- year-old *sonero* and *bolerista* who had been shining shoes for a living when he was invited to join the group.

To an even greater extent than in *Cachao*, however, the director's aims exceed the mere documentation of musical activities. This larger ambition is apparent first of all in the visual texture of the film, which is the result of its having been shot in high-definition video rather than directly on film stock. Wenders has exper-

Buena Vista Social Club: The band at a sell-out Amsterdam concert

Ibrahim Ferrer (left) and Omara Portuondo

imented with video technology before, notably in *Until the End of the World* (1991), where it was employed in the sequences involving a machine that records people's dreams so that they can be watched on television. As William Hurt's character explains in that film, "The camera records what you see, but it also records how your brain reacts in response to what your eyes see." For Wenders, the pixilated, slightly hazy quality of video, with its blurred movements and images running off into large fields of light or dark, is associated with the inevitably subjective quality of experience, and his use of video in *Buena Vista Social Club* helps to suggest that our impressions of a foreign country are necessarily a kind of dream or imaginative construction made up of sound and image as well as our own desires. And since a film about subjectivity must have a perceiving subject, that role is assigned to the American visitors, Ry Cooder and his son Joachim, as they drive along the Malecón among ancient Chevys and Buicks and through the weathered but still grand streets of Old Havana, with their windowless windows, pitted facades, and shadowy archways. But the most evocative element in this tropical dreamscape is, of course, the music, and above all the old-fashioned boleros like the startlingly beautiful "Silencio," here sung in a haunting, smoky-romantic arrangement by Ibrahim Ferrer and the regal Omara Portuondo.

It would, however, be a mistake to overemphasize the purely dream-like quality of the film, for Wenders also shows us something else, beyond the layers of imagination and desire. Revising a famous piece of ignorance by J. A. Froude, one might say simply, There are people there. The story of Ry Cooder's acquaintance with Cuban music is emblematic. He was first drawn to Havana over twenty years ago by a tape that seemed to promise untapped musical riches in the form of some astonishing playing by an anonymous performer on an unidentifiable stringed instrument. Then, during the recording of the *Buena Vista Social Club* album, Cooder discovered that one of the participating musicians was the very man whose playing had beguiled him so many years before, and we are duly introduced to the mustachioed virtuoso himself, Barbarito Torres, who is the country's leading performer on a

Compay Segundo

small, lute-like instrument of Arabic origin called the laoud. This pattern is repeated several times over the course of the film. For example, in the very opening sequence, we ride in a vintage convertible with the 90-year-old patriarch of the group, Compay Segundo, in search of the original Buena Vista Social Club, a black-only hotspot in pre-revolutionary Havana. The location is not obvious; it becomes necessary to ask the old people of the neighborhood for help. "Where are the *viejos*?" asks Compay; and for a brief, wistful moment it appears that his search may end unsuccessfully for lack of any living witnesses from the older generation. A moment later, however, he is besieged by *viejos* with long memories squabbling over who gets to deliver the information. He enters into discussion with them about, among other things, hangover remedies.

Thus, we come to understand that, in spite of various losses and imminent departures, much remains of the way of life from which this music grew. Behind the famous songs, behind the romantic images and legends are people, with dreams, memories, and desires of their own. One such fantasy that is hinted at from time to time throughout the film (as when Ibrahim Ferrer sings a few bars of "Chattanooga Choo-Choo") and then emerges movingly in the final segment is the Cubans' own dream of the United States, which is realized in the form of a visit to New York and a wildly popular concert in Carnegie Hall. (Tickets to this show sold out in three days without advertisement.) As one of the revolutionary slogans on a Havana billboard declares, "Dreams Do Come True." Perhaps the most scandalous aspect of *Buena Vista Social Club*, at least for anyone who feels that a documentary about contemporary Cuba is required to present a grim indictment of the government, is the extent to which this is a film about happiness and acceptance of the ups and downs of life. To be sure, the extraordinary good fortune documented by the film comes late, but not too late to be enjoyed if one knows how, as Ibrahim Ferrer implies when he remarks (unexpectedly, in view of his humble surroundings), "We Cubans are very lucky"; and the viewer is treated to the satisfying spectacle of a man who prefers to savor what he has been given rather than bemoan what he has been denied. To have put such a rich mixture of human dreams and human reality on film is a remarkable achievement on the part of the director. And for that we are the ones who are lucky.

Gary Hentzi is Associate Professor of English at Baruch College/CUNY. He has published both essays and reviews in *Film Quarterly*, notably "Little Cinema of Horrors" (46.3) and "Peter Weir and the Cinema of New Age Humanism" (44.2).

Oliver Stone's USA

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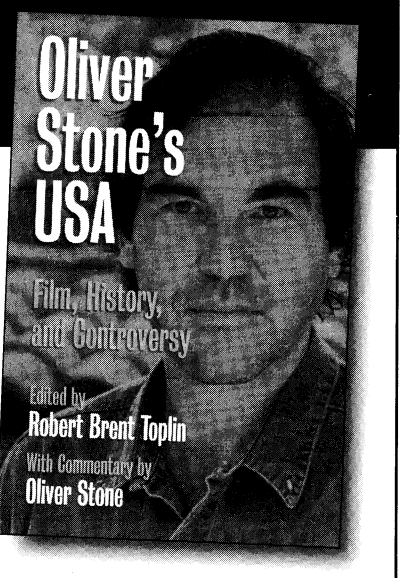
Edited by Robert Brent Toplin • With Commentary by Oliver Stone



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Annual *Film Quarterly* Film Book Survey

PART I

Don't Let It Get You

By John O'Shea. Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press, 1999.

New Zealand Film 1912–1996

By Helen Martin and Sam Edwards. Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Although you've probably never heard of him, John O' Shea is one of the founding figures of New Zealand cinema, along with the late Rudall Hayward. Between them these two men, working independently and without the aid of a studio or a distributor, created the modern sound feature film in New Zealand. O'Shea, founder of Pacific Films and an early mentor to Jane Campion and Sam Neill, directed three major feature films between 1952 and 1966: *Broken Barrier* (1952), the first feature film to deal with an interracial romance between a Maori woman and a Pakeha (white) man; *Runaway* (1964), in which an alienated young Pakeha man drops out of New Zealand society and winds up hiking off into the mountains alone to his death; and *Don't Let It Get You* (1966), a sharply observed interracial pop musical in the style of *A Hard Day's Night,* starring the Maori pop star Howard Morrison.

In all his films, O'Shea strove to make some sort of connection between Maori and colonial culture, and to bring to the forefront the struggle for cultural identity between the races which is still going on today. Of necessity, O'Shea also produced two hundred documentaries and thousands of commercials, and worked under conditions of brutal economy. *Broken Barrier* was shot for less than $10,000 on two 35mm silent Arriflex cameras; *Runaway* was made for a mere $50,000. Even in his television commercial work, O'Shea always sought to break new ground; it was his Pacific Films that produced the first TV advertisement (in 1970!) in which Maoris and whites were seen in the same frame. A brutally honest and engaging tale, O'Shea's autobiography, *Don't Let It Get You,* is essential reading for anyone who would understand the history and struggle of the feature film in New Zealand, when all the forces of government interference, censorship, and public indifference conspired against the production of narrative films of any kind. We know Jane Campion, Peter Jackson, Alison Maclean, and other New Zealand filmmakers well; it's high time we became better acquainted with the person who inspired them to start making films in the first place. It's also a reminder of the dangers of canon: Why aren't O'Shea's films (or Hayward's films) taught in classrooms, or even mentioned?

Which brings me to Helen Martin and Sam Edwards' *New Zealand Film 1912-1996.* As a one-stop source for the history of New Zealand feature filmmaking, the book is unbeatable. Each feature gets a full page of credits, description, and a still. The book is attractively designed and on the whole, quite accurate. There are minor errors. In some cases, films are described as being lost when footage, happily, still remains (as with Gustav Pauli's *The Romance of Hine-Moa* [1927], of which 20 minutes in 35mm hand-tinted color still survive). More serious is the problem with the text itself; the book has a "hammered out" quality, and the authors can be surprisingly condescending to the very films they seek to valorize. Too often, we get opinion rather than serious analysis. This is especially serious given the fact that most readers haven't seen the films under discussion. I spent part of the summer of 1999 at the New Zealand Film Archive, and saw most of the early films described in *New Zealand Film 1912–1996,* and I think that the authors are frequently far too harsh and unforgiving in their comments. Many of the films covered are beautiful, deeply personal works which involve

considerable personal and economic sacrifice, and display enormous skill and dedication. Too often, Martin and Edwards give short shrift to films that deserve a much more thorough reading. That said, the book—the only one that covers the feature film in New Zealand in its entirety—is still an essential item for any serious collection on world cinema. Hopefully, more will be forthcoming.

Wheeler Winston Dixon is Chair of the Film Studies Program at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

Double Takes

Culture and Gender in French Films and Their American Remakes

By Carolyn A. Durham. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England/Dartmouth College, 1999. $45.00 cloth; $21.95 paper.

Carolyn Durham is a self-described "feminist critic." It is therefore not surprising that her study of American remakes of French films ends up focusing on a crosscultural analysis of gender roles, even if she admits in her conclusion that she did not consciously plan to do so from the inception of her research project. Durham is clearly well versed in feminist theory, and her study uncovers revealing differences underlying various representations of femininity and masculinity in relation to national identity.

The opening chapter immediately seeks to place the study of remakes within the broader context of recent French-American relations and popular culture. Like EuroDisney, remakes are often considered proof of American imperialism's readiness to absorb a foreign culture, although they can also be perceived as pale imitations proving the creativity and irreducible "Frenchness" of the originals. Or, as the author implies, remakes may be new hybrids unavoidably resulting from the growing internationalization of culture and, therefore, defying hasty comparisons.

This notion of hybridity is further explored in "Comic Strips and Cultural Stereotypes," in the context of Alain Resnais's *I Want to Go Home* (1989), based on a screenplay by an American cartoonist (Jules Feiffer), mixing animation and live characters as well as English and French dialogs, in order to satirize stereotypical representations of national identity, especially visual/pop culture (considered to be typically American) and high culture (associated with France). The focus on this single film also emphasizes that the notion of the remake itself should not be confined to cinematographic doublets because cinema constantly reworks scenes and thematic concerns from earlier films, and *I Want to Go Home,* the familiar story of two Americans in Paris (one man and one woman), is a form of commentary on this practice.

To further compare gender issues, on which Durham's book more narrowly focuses from this point on, Durham introduces the notion of "third case," i.e., the need for a three-way textual analysis of French and American visual representations in order to uncover subtle patterns and avoid oversimplifications. Thus, the third chapter examines Godard's *A bout de souffle* not only in light of its 1983 American remake (Jim McBride's *Breathless in LA*), but also in relation to past film practices, because the 1959 classic, in a sense, was already an unconventional version of the banal American-in-Paris story. Through his irreverent use of cinematographic techniques, Godard subordinates the narrative to a philosophical exploration about the profound inability of men and women to communicate, which goes beyond crosscultural miscommunication. In contrast, McBride's *Breathless,* conceived as a marketable commodity, becomes a thoroughly conventional Hollywood romance in which the conflict between two individuals (an American man facing a masculinity crisis and an Americanized woman) gives way to a happy ending suiting American expectations.

With her three-way analysis of motherhood, masculinity, and marriage, Durham points to major differences in French and American feminist positions. She interestingly argues that the misogynist subtext of Serreau's 1985 *Trois hommes et un couffin,* in which men become surrogate mothers as the result of women's incompetence, stems from French feminists' valorization of women's bodies and biological ability to give birth. Nimoy's 1987 remake, *Three Men and a Baby,* has a different misogynist discourse in response to the American feminist approach which emphasizes gender equality and societal change: in this case, men can play mothers' roles without becoming substitute women and giving up their virility. As for Ardolino's 1990 *Three Men and a Little Lady,* a Franco-American coproduction, it is a strange "sequel-remake" hybrid borrowing from both earlier versions and conveying a more complex sense of gender roles within American society. It promotes the traditional nuclear family, but it also portrays the "New Male" able to express his emotions, in accord with women's changing expectations of men in both Nimoy's and Ardolino's films. (Does this remark imply that gender roles are evolving faster in American than in French society, or can the chronological order of the three films largely explain the progression?)

Whereas a similar discourse on gender had to be read against their different cultural contexts in Serreau's, Nimoy's, and Ardolino's films, Durham observes the reverse process in Jean-Charles Tacchela's 1975 *Cousin, Cousine* and its remake, Joel Schumacher's 1989 *Cousins,* where cultural differences shape the treatment of gender issues. In keeping with the accepted image of French culture, Tacchela's narrative about an adulterous affair between two cousins conveys a sense of passion, pleasure, play, fantasy, and sexual as well as general freedom. Although Schumacher's story follows the French original very closely, the moral position of the American remake becomes essentially puritanical, even if *Cousins* leaves some room for a critical and feminist reading.

Since Durham repeatedly warns against the danger of hasty generalizations, I found it unfortunate when she occasionally succumbed to the temptation. The difference between *Cousin, Cousine* and *Cousins,* she claims, is ultimately

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subordinate to "a cultural thematics of happiness that is as American as Tacchela's notion of freedom is French" (133). One could as easily argue that the concept of freedom has played an integral part in American culture and Hollywood films (with the myth of the West or the dream of the self-made individual, for instance); conversely, most French popular comedies convey a conservative message and end with the reconstitution of a happy nuclear family, as Durham herself has pointed out in some of her studies. In fact, *Cousin, Cousine,* which was not a top-grossing film in France but met with exceptional success in the United States, may be more revelatory of the stereotypical vision of the French by Americans than of French popular culture.

The chapter titled "Other Ways of Looking: Re-Vision of Feminism and Film Theory in François Truffaut's and Blake Edwards' *The Man Who Loved Women*" is the final extended comparative analysis of the book. Both these texts, however, remain concerned predominantly with men, leading the author to turn to a third text, Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women,* for a displacement of the male gaze and exclusively feminist perspective on the relation between the sexes. Durham's last chapter, "Contemporary French to American Comedy or the Compulsion to Compare," includes several more concise comparative studies which confirm the difficulty of generalizations in the fast growing field of remakes. As she readily admitted earlier, "different Franco-American pairings will produce different insights, including in the area of gender and culture" (140). Luc Besson's *Nikita* (1990), remade into John Badham's *Point of No Return* (1993), like Edouard Molinaro's *La Cage aux folles* (1978) and Mike Nichols' remake *The Birdcage* (1996), reveals minor differences between the pairs. But nationality seemed to matter in the case of remakes based on several of Francis Veber's comedies: *Les Fugitifs* (1986) and *Three Fugitives* (1989), both directed by Veber; *Les Compères* (1983) and the 1997 remake by Ivan Reitman, *Father's Day*; *La Chèvre* (1981) and its remake by Nadia Tass, *Pure Luck* (1991). All these French comedies revolved around the Gérard Depardieu/Pierre Richard contrast, most often as a masculine-feminine opposition, whereas the American remakes tended to follow the Hollywood "buddy" tradition.

Given the prominence of Veber as the single most important source of remakes, it is surprising that he was not the object of a complete chapter in the body of the book, especially since Durham noted that her choice of directors was at first guided by a balance between auteurs (Resnais, Godard, Truffaut) and mainstream directors (Veber, Serreau, Tacchela). Although the author readily admits that she never intended her study of remakes to be either representative or exhaustive, it is unclear why she opted to replace a chapter on Veber with a study of *French in Action,* a pedagogical video series designed for teaching the French language.

New studies need to follow up on the author's original intention to contrast critically acclaimed and mainstream directors because, as Durham stressed, French popular comedies and "art" films are usually worlds apart. Therefore, remaking French popular films into their American popular counterparts greatly differs from translating "high culture" into American "low culture." Durham also frequently refers to the evolution of feminist theory, but it would be equally important to closely examine the sociohistorical context of the films and the time lapse between originals and remakes. Rethinking remakes, and gender roles, through a cross-cultural and diachronic study of high and low culture as well as feminism may in the future allow for further theorization of the gender differences revealed by Durham in her detailed case studies.

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Film/Genre

By Rick Altman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1999. $65.00 cloth; $22.50 paper.

Rick Altman's widely anticipated *Film/Genre* makes a significant contribution to the theory and practice of genre study in particular and cinema studies in general. The author of "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" (1984) and *The American Film Musical* (1987) has already established himself as a lucid, persuasive, and scholarly voice in genre study, and his new book will confirm his leadership in this field. Any serious work in film genre will have to take Altman's thinking into account.

In the preface Altman announces that "the present book grows directly out of misgivings regarding the theoretical foundations of my earlier work" (ix). In the conclusion he offers a revised "semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach," after a carefully argued response to questions central to the understanding of film genre. The opening two chapters review the tradition of genre study in literature from Aristotle to the post-structuralists and in film studies during the twentieth century. The summary touches the principal concepts guiding the field while setting up the adversarial positions Altman will reevaluate in the body of his text. Chapters three to eight focus upon the origins, evolution, and process of generic transformation marking the cinema, giving careful attention to the role of the film industry, film critics, and the films themselves. Chapters nine to twelve shift attention to the role of the film audience in the constitution of genres leading up to a call for genre study to "embed reception in a broader process-oriented and interactive analysis of competing user groups" (211). In addition, the book includes in an appendix Altman's influential 1984 essay on film genre from which much of his current thinking unfolds.

While dealing with theoretical concepts, Altman succeeds in writing an accessible book organized around clearly stated questions and straightforward answers. His major conclusions are highlighted in summaries which force even a muddled mind like my own to stare down key points until they have either sunk in persuasively, provoked fresh questions, or crystallized lingering doubts. Throughout *Film/Genre,* Altman's wit and erudition make the text a pleasure to read and will increase the esteem the author already enjoys among his colleagues.

subordinate to "a cultural thematics of happiness that is as American as Tacchela's notion of freedom is French" (133). One could as easily argue that the concept of freedom has played an integral part in American culture and Hollywood films (with the myth of the West or the dream of the self-made individual, for instance); conversely, most French popular comedies convey a conservative message and end with the reconstitution of a happy nuclear family, as Durham herself has pointed out in some of her studies. In fact, *Cousin, Cousine,* which was not a top-grossing film in France but met with exceptional success in the United States, may be more revelatory of the stereotypical vision of the French by Americans than of French popular culture.

The chapter titled "Other Ways of Looking: Re-Vision of Feminism and Film Theory in François Truffaut's and Blake Edwards' *The Man Who Loved Women*" is the final extended comparative analysis of the book. Both these texts, however, remain concerned predominantly with men, leading the author to turn to a third text, Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women,* for a displacement of the male gaze and exclusively feminist perspective on the relation between the sexes. Durham's last chapter, "Contemporary French to American Comedy or the Compulsion to Compare," includes several more concise comparative studies which confirm the difficulty of generalizations in the fast growing field of remakes. As she readily admitted earlier, "different Franco-American pairings will produce different insights, including in the area of gender and culture" (140). Luc Besson's *Nikita* (1990), remade into John Badham's *Point of No Return* (1993), like Edouard Molinaro's *La Cage aux folles* (1978) and Mike Nichols' remake *The Birdcage* (1996), reveals minor differences between the pairs. But nationality seemed to matter in the case of remakes based on several of Francis Veber's comedies: *Les Fugitifs* (1986) and *Three Fugitives* (1989), both directed by Veber; *Les Compères* (1983) and the 1997 remake by Ivan Reitman, *Father's Day*; *La Chèvre* (1981) and its remake by Nadia Tass, *Pure Luck* (1991). All these French comedies revolved around the Gérard Depardieu/Pierre Richard contrast, most often as a masculine-feminine opposition, whereas the American remakes tended to follow the Hollywood "buddy" tradition.

Given the prominence of Veber as the single most important source of remakes, it is surprising that he was not the object of a complete chapter in the body of the book, especially since Durham noted that her choice of directors was at first guided by a balance between auteurs (Resnais, Godard, Truffaut) and mainstream directors (Veber, Serreau, Tacchela). Although the author readily admits that she never intended her study of remakes to be either representative or exhaustive, it is unclear why she opted to replace a chapter on Veber with a study of *French in Action,* a pedagogical video series designed for teaching the French language.

New studies need to follow up on the author's original intention to contrast critically acclaimed and mainstream directors because, as Durham stressed, French popular comedies and "art" films are usually worlds apart. Therefore, remaking French popular films into their American popular counterparts greatly differs from translating "high culture" into American "low culture." Durham also frequently refers to the evolution of feminist theory, but it would be equally important to closely examine the sociohistorical context of the films and the time lapse between originals and remakes. Rethinking remakes, and gender roles, through a cross-cultural and diachronic study of high and low culture as well as feminism may in the future allow for further theorization of the gender differences revealed by Durham in her detailed case studies.

Martine Danan teaches film and media studies at Kutztown University.

Film/Genre

By Rick Altman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1999. $65.00 cloth; $22.50 paper.

Rick Altman's widely anticipated *Film/Genre* makes a significant contribution to the theory and practice of genre study in particular and cinema studies in general. The author of "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" (1984) and *The American Film Musical* (1987) has already established himself as a lucid, persuasive, and scholarly voice in genre study, and his new book will confirm his leadership in this field. Any serious work in film genre will have to take Altman's thinking into account.

In the preface Altman announces that "the present book grows directly out of misgivings regarding the theoretical foundations of my earlier work" (ix). In the conclusion he offers a revised "semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach," after a carefully argued response to questions central to the understanding of film genre. The opening two chapters review the tradition of genre study in literature from Aristotle to the post-structuralists and in film studies during the twentieth century. The summary touches the principal concepts guiding the field while setting up the adversarial positions Altman will reevaluate in the body of his text. Chapters three to eight focus upon the origins, evolution, and process of generic transformation marking the cinema, giving careful attention to the role of the film industry, film critics, and the films themselves. Chapters nine to twelve shift attention to the role of the film audience in the constitution of genres leading up to a call for genre study to "embed reception in a broader process-oriented and interactive analysis of competing user groups" (211). In addition, the book includes in an appendix Altman's influential 1984 essay on film genre from which much of his current thinking unfolds.

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Rather than finding in film genres a cluster of stable conventions, Altman emphasises genre as an ongoing process, an unending discursive exchange among competing users: filmmakers, studios, critics, and audiences. Drawing examples from the musical, the Western and the biopic, he illustrates how distinctive generic qualities arose in conjunction with more dominant genres and only later established their independence as a result of a cycle of successful films which developed and refined elements into a recognizable formula. Genre mixing is found to be pervasive in film history rather than an exceptional trait of "New Hollywood." And generic change continues through further cross-fertilization among films as well as in the interchange between the filmmakers and the film audience. As a result, Altman argues, a genre is not a series of films but "lies somewhere in the overall circulation of meaning constitutive of the process" (84).

His careful examination of studio publicity reveals that studios, rather than using genre as a basis for attracting an audience through their marketing, avoid clear generic labeling for allusive references to multiple film types. Publicity highlights film cycles or properties exclusive to the firm, such as stars, rather than easily shared qualities, such as genre. Doubts are thus raised about genre functioning as an ideological tool of the studio system, at least as it is commonly understood. Generic terms, as well as a genre's distinctive elements and defining relationships, are employed most conspicuously by critics who propose viewing perspectives to spectators based upon connections to earlier films. As a result genre arises not so much out of films, but out of texts produced in response to films.

In the latter half of the book Altman's concept of "generic crossroads" presents an intriguing model for spectatorship. At Altman's "crossroads," the film poses a conflict between cultural values and generic pleasure which arises from a choice confronting the protagonist. The plot presents a series of crossroads marked by accelerating intensity in which the hero, followed by the genre fan, repeatedly takes the path toward pleasure until the resolution in which the cultural norm is reaffirmed and the viewer allowed to safely reenter the social world. The gangster chooses crime, the spy espionage, the lovers passion, the adventurer danger, and the genre fan embraces these vicarious pursuits. Genres thereby offer countercultural pleasures regulated by the cultural institution constituted by generic practices.

Combining the countercultural elements underlying the generic crossroads with Altman's conviction that genre is a process of continual change, genre becomes a much more dynamic social force than the well-established options in the critical literature between ritual celebration or ideological entrapment. Altman describes a generic process of endless transformation in which audiences enjoy cultural resistance and may even be disappointed with the return to safety. The audience thereby exercises considerable power, and genres are not so much a means of social containment as a vehicle for spectator interaction. Of course, the text still guides the spectator through the crossroads and back to the norm, but Altman invests the generic spectators with even greater power as a "constellated community."

At the heart of Altman's revised "pragmatic" approach lies his concept of "lateral communication" between viewers who in spite of their physical isolation from each other constitute a "constellated community" through a common orientation toward a particular genre. This "lateral communication" is characterized as a secondary discourse among viewers who share generic pleasures rather than between the spectator and the film itself; furthermore, this "invisible bond" is often imagined by the spectator and evident in the film itself. Rather than finding in film journalism and scholarship a substantial manifestation of "constellated communities," Altman regards these writings as generally constituting a primary discourse between the film and the viewer rather than a secondary exchange among viewers, so they do not appear to serve as evidence of this community. At least Altman never points to them as tangible examples. Initially I found the "constellated community" a modest, if generalized characterization of audience dynamics. However, as *Film/Genre* draws to a close, this community becomes a central element of Altman's approach, which as a result grows increasingly troublesome. For Altman this community is actually multiple competing groups which use the genre they share in diverse ways, and the struggles among them become an engine propelling the process of genre transformation. As a general sketch of audience response this may be the case, but as a pragmatic suggestion for critical study it strikes me as next to impossible because wide-ranging, persuasive data cannot be found. Here Altman is disappointing because in a book which is otherwise rich in concrete examples he fails to present specific details as to how evidence of such competing communities could be gathered and employed in a genre study. Altman is not simply seeking out small groups of "poachers," such as the alternative gay reading of Judy Garland portrayed by Janet Staiger in *Interpreting Films*, but in the closing pages, writes, "only by shifting attention from reception practices alone to the broader—and conflicting—usage patterns of all users can we escape the residual tyranny of the text-king" (213). For Altman it is this "use factor" which is central to his pragmatics. To discover and analyze the competing uses of genre by multiple communities apart from the evidence of the published critical response, production, marketing and exhibition data, and the films themselves, seems elusive at best and finally impossible. In my view the eloquent and insightful writings by the best critics about films individually or as a group remain not simply the most compelling evidence of response, but also the central arena in which competing schemas for using film and genre can be posed and tested. Textual analysis of films becomes in Altman's conclusion a retrograde practice impeding genre study, but the elusive search for lateral communication among competing user groups strikes me as a pale and impractical alternative.

In spite of my reservations as *Film/Genre* draws its conclusions, this work remains a rich contribution to film studies. Rick Altman's portrayal of the process of generic evolution and his concept of the "generic crossroads" are only a few of the valuable and engaging ideas expressed. As a result, the unattractive cover design is particularly unfor-

tunate because it discourages prospective readers rather than drawing them to a rewarding study. Errors in an otherwise commendable bibliography are also regrettable (Noël Carroll's book is *The Philosophy of Horror* rather than *The Power of Horror* and James Naremore's *More Than Night* was published in 1998 rather than 1988). But I urge you, if you have an interest in film genre, to read this book. In response maybe some readers, or even Altman himself, may produce new scholarship documenting the response of the genre audience and increasing our understanding of this vital area of film studies.

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The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson

By R. Bruce Elder. Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998. $58.95.

Stan Brakhage has often expressed his admiration for painters, composers, writers, and filmmakers who have enriched his intellectual and creative life. Among the writers, none are mentioned more frequently than Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson, and while other commentators have noted Brakhage's affinities with one or more of these writers, Bruce Elder goes much farther in examining the common ground Brakhage shares not only with Pound, Stein, and Olson, but also with Ralph Waldo Emerson, T.E. Hulme, Ernest Fenollosa, William Carlos Williams, Michael McClure, and Allen Ginsberg. He also draws extensively upon the philosophical works of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead, and Merleau-Ponty to illuminate Brakhage's ideas and art, and to place him within a dominant strain of American Modernism.

Elder covers more literary and philosophical ground than I can summarize here. But central to his approach is T. E. Hulme's proposition (strongly influenced by Henri Bergson) that the language of poetry should be "a visual concrete one," that it is "a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily." After introducing this key idea in modern poetics, Elder offers a good survey of American "particularism" from Emerson to William Carlos Williams and a detailed consideration of Fenollosa's "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," which Ezra Pound adopted as a personal *ars poetica*. Although Elder's presentation of Pound's poetry and poetics reads a bit like a "Beginner's Guide to Pound," he does a good job of weaving together Pound's, Brakhage's, Fenollosa's (and Bergson's) sense of the image as a charged, dynamic entity—in Fenollosa's formulation: "Noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things." Elder is also good on Stein's and Brakhage's commitment to "particularism" and "dailiness" ("to discover[ing] ordinarily unseen depths in quotidian reality," as Elder puts it [291]), as well as their use of repetition as a formal and signifying strategy. And his careful examination of Olson's ideas on proprioception, open form, and projective verse makes it clear why they had such a strong appeal for Brakhage.

Elder discusses very few of Brakhage's films in detail—he takes a familiarity with Brakhage's work for granted. He is more interested in highlighting similarities and common interests—not necessarily direct lines of influence—between Brakhage and writers and philosophers who helped to shape Brakhage's intellectual and artistic milieu and who represent a variety of loosely related attitudes toward (a) the body as a source of preverbal, primordial experience, and (b) art as the translation of that experience into words, images and, in the case of "modern dance," bodies in motion.

Elder casts his net very wide and, consequently, his catch sometimes includes rather incompatible topics (Emersonian Transcendentalism and Hulme's "classicism," for example, or Italian Futurism and Pound's Confucianism), and at other times his generalizations and leaps in logic confuse rather than clarify important issues. For example, discussing Brakhage's "Romanticism" (296-97), Elder first says that the Romantics "prized vision above language" and that Brakhage "expounds similar Romantic ideas" (which is true), but then he notes that, "[T]he doctrines that are the provenance of Brakhage's poetics are teachings that identify poetry with music . . . ," and he quotes Pseudo-Longinus on the sublimity of "[poetic] composition, which is a kind of melody in words." After some further comments on the relationship of poetry and music, Elder quotes a passage from Wordsworth's "On the Power of Sound" which evokes an image of sounds (but not music) entering the "dark and blind" inner ear: "Intricate labyrinth, more dread for thought/To enter than oracular cave." Elder says he quoted the passage "to dispel the belief that Romantics celebrated vision above hearing," but there is no celebration of hearing above vision in the lines he quotes, and even if there were, it would not justify such a vast generalization about the relative merits of vision and hearing in Romantic aesthetics. There is also the troubling slippage between "language" and "hearing" in Elder's first and second generalizations about the Romantics' attitude toward vision, and given Brakhage's frequent references to visual perception, the image, the imagination, and light as central to his creative process, it is not clear how the Romantics' supposed demotion of vision applies to Brakhage.

As much as I admire Elder's erudition and insights, I do not find him very successful at developing clear, consistent lines of argument. His book is full of information and ideas, but they are presented in chunks that often don't fit very securely together. Frequently, long passages on writers and philosophers seem to be there as much for their own sake as for what they tell us about Brakhage and the American tradition of Pound, Stein, and Olson, and they make the book much longer than it needs to be: 450 pages of text followed

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by a 19-page glossary of terms; 58 pages of notes, many of which are lengthy and discursive; and 40 pages devoted to a selected bibliography, a Brakhage filmography from 1952 to1998, and an index. Moreover, the book is a continuation of Elder's previous book, *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (inexplicably left out of this book's bibliography). Elder develops the central tenets of the earlier book in a long preface, but only readers of that book will be able to appreciate Elder's pointed references to Antonin Artaud, Carolee Schneemann, James Herbert, Gnosticism, and other subjects covered in *A Body of Vision*, but not developed here.

Compounding these difficulties is Elder's seeming indifference to current critical issues in film and cultural studies, which leads to dismissive statements like the following: "A complete debasement of spiritual forms of experience is evident in the currently fashionable theorization of 'the body' which has managed to convert the last site of resistance to the hegemony of the word [i.e., the body] into yet another empty, metanarrative signifier" (2). Elder does not critique this "currently fashionable theorization" directly, nor does he name names in notes or his bibliography. He seems to count on the vigor and sincerity of his presentation and the implied moral superiority of his position to take the place of debate with rival positions. As this quote also indicates, Elder uses terms like "spiritual," "soul," "the Divine," and even "the power of prayer" without the qualifications and elaborations one would expect of a scholar in our secular age. This, along with his failure to address alternative theoretical approaches to the body, is doubly unfortunate. It threatens to isolate him from a critical discourse that could benefit from insights and oppositional voices like Elder's, and because it is most apparent at the beginning of the book (and of little consequence thereafter), it may prevent readers from going on to discover the book's strengths, which, as I have tried to suggest, lie in Elder's detailed and elaborate exploration of affinities between Brakhage and a rich and still vital body of philosophical thought and literary theory and practice.

It is also unfortunate that the book was not more carefully revised and edited. In addition to a number of typographical errors, there are phrases and even full sentences repeated within a few pages of each other, and some observations and generalizations are repeated, as if for the first time, at several points in the book. Some errors that slipped through include crediting Pudovkin with carrying out the famous montage experiments that produced what has long been called the "Kuleshov effect" and naming Charles Olson as the author of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* at one point in the text.

If *The Films of Stan Brakhage* presents a number of problems for even the most interested and sympathetic of readers, it also shows in convincing detail that Brakhage's achievements, as unique and personal as they may seem, fall within a larger context of theories of consciousness, language, and literature to which some of the most innovative figures of twentieth-century American literature subscribed. Elder demonstrates that without an understanding of what these figures contributed to American Modernism, we cannot understand Brakhage and what *he* has contributed to the same movement.

William C. Wees, Emeritus Professor at McGill University, is Editor of the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* and author of *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film* and *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films*.

Hitchcock's America

Edited by Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. $39.95 cloth; $17.95 paper.

When Hitchcock transplanted himself and his family from England to Hollywood in 1939, he was attracted primarily to concrete opportunities, not the American landscape or the many challenges of the American way of life. For all that he identified himself as a British filmmaker in his early years, calling for close attention to British subjects in his films and those of his compatriots, and relying heavily on what he thought of as his intimate knowledge of the British countryside, cityscape, and audience and character psychology, he nevertheless described himself, with great pride, as an American-trained cinematic artist, brought up on the style and production methods of American filmmaking. At least in retrospect, his shift to Hollywood seems an overdetermined and inevitable career move. But the essays gathered by Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington show that Hitchcock's move to America was not only to a studio system that offered him tremendous technical resources and increased money and power as a director-producer, but also to an American thematic. Taken as a whole, *Hitchcock's America* confirms very convincingly the editors' claim that "at the center of Hitchcock's Hollywood films stands a sustained, specific, and extraordinarily acute exploration of American culture" (5).

The issues that define the mid-century American thematic are generally agreed upon throughout the volume. Problems of self-making and sexual identity in a world of constraints, freedom and creativity versus domesticity and commercialized civilization, independence versus social and political engagement, and uncontrollable impulsive as well as institutional violence are some of the recurrent general topics, considered not as abstractions but as they take specific spatial and historical form in Hitchcock's visualizations of wartime, postwar, and cold war America. In their introduction, Freedman and Millington envision Hitchcock as an "anthropological or ethnographic participant observer" (7), both inside and outside his new homeland and its ensemble of traps, restrictions, and ideological pressures. Needless to say, the contributors draw their lines in different places, positioning him sometimes as a capitulator to and enforcer of repressive ideology, and other times as a "canny participant and critical observer" (8).

The volume is framed by essays that ground formalist analysis in the context of Hitchcock's working conditions

by a 19-page glossary of terms; 58 pages of notes, many of which are lengthy and discursive; and 40 pages devoted to a selected bibliography, a Brakhage filmography from 1952 to1998, and an index. Moreover, the book is a continuation of Elder's previous book, *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (inexplicably left out of this book's bibliography). Elder develops the central tenets of the earlier book in a long preface, but only readers of that book will be able to appreciate Elder's pointed references to Antonin Artaud, Carolee Schneemann, James Herbert, Gnosticism, and other subjects covered in *A Body of Vision*, but not developed here.

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When Hitchcock transplanted himself and his family from England to Hollywood in 1939, he was attracted primarily to concrete opportunities, not the American landscape or the many challenges of the American way of life. For all that he identified himself as a British filmmaker in his early years, calling for close attention to British subjects in his films and those of his compatriots, and relying heavily on what he thought of as his intimate knowledge of the British countryside, cityscape, and audience and character psychology, he nevertheless described himself, with great pride, as an American-trained cinematic artist, brought up on the style and production methods of American filmmaking. At least in retrospect, his shift to Hollywood seems an overdetermined and inevitable career move. But the essays gathered by Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington show that Hitchcock's move to America was not only to a studio system that offered him tremendous technical resources and increased money and power as a director-producer, but also to an American thematic. Taken as a whole, *Hitchcock's America* confirms very convincingly the editors' claim that "at the center of Hitchcock's Hollywood films stands a sustained, specific, and extraordinarily acute exploration of American culture" (5).

The issues that define the mid-century American thematic are generally agreed upon throughout the volume. Problems of self-making and sexual identity in a world of constraints, freedom and creativity versus domesticity and commercialized civilization, independence versus social and political engagement, and uncontrollable impulsive as well as institutional violence are some of the recurrent general topics, considered not as abstractions but as they take specific spatial and historical form in Hitchcock's visualizations of wartime, postwar, and cold war America. In their introduction, Freedman and Millington envision Hitchcock as an "anthropological or ethnographic participant observer" (7), both inside and outside his new homeland and its ensemble of traps, restrictions, and ideological pressures. Needless to say, the contributors draw their lines in different places, positioning him sometimes as a capitulator to and enforcer of repressive ideology, and other times as a "canny participant and critical observer" (8).

The volume is framed by essays that ground formalist analysis in the context of Hitchcock's working conditions

and thematic concerns. Debra Fried pictures Hollywood as a site of struggle for Hitchcock, and suggests that he asserted control by adopting his own kind of anti-Hollywood production routine (frustrating Selznick, for example, by cutting a film in his head and shooting minimal footage) and also by turning "shopworn" stylistic conventions (e.g., cutaways, rear-projection shots, the star and genre systems) to his own creative and often self-reflexive uses. The premise that Hitchcock was "in a state of defiance on the studio lot" (17) fails to take into account the more positively empowering aspects of the studio system and Hitchcock's construction of a remarkably cooperative team of co-workers and executors of his cinematic designs, but leads Fried to some fine comments illustrating the often overlooked complexity of "the ordinary workhouse shots of a Hitchcock picture" (21). In the concluding essay of the volume, Michael Wood similarly examines the density of Hitchcock's style, reading *Family Plot* as not only an exercise in putting together an intricate cinematic puzzle but also, in Fredric Jameson's words, "taking the American misery apart" (184). Wood compares *Family Plot* to *Anna Karenina, Remembrance of Things Past,* and *Middlemarch*—implicitly reminding us that "Americanness" need not be defined as provincially as it sometimes is—and suggestively conveys how the intersecting lines, double plot, and closed spaces of the film emblematize characteristic American dramas and fears.

The essays reimmerse Hitchcock's films in the history of their times, but history is sometimes a blunt instrument. Elsie B. Michie's essay on "Hitchcock and American Domesticity" shows how much can be gleaned from an unexpected pairing of *Shadow of a Doubt* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), and her detailed analysis of the "good mothers" of these films, figures of strenuous determination and ineradicable desire, insightfully alerts us to Hitchcock's often uncredited creation of "the space for a narrative of female maturation" (42). Properly historicizing these films, though, will take more than an illustrative epigraph by J. Edgar Hoover (presumably standing for the—unexamined—mid-1940s official consensus on motherhood) and loose generalizations: Rosie the Riveter might disagree with the uncontested claim that "the early 1940s, was a time when there was a shift away from independent roles for women" (37). Paula Marantz Cohen similarly makes an unusual but rewarding pairing of films, examining *The Wrong Man* and *Vertigo* as transitional works in Hitchcock's career that evoke "existential horror" (165), an increasingly disempowered self, and Hitchcock's "loss of faith" in his own creative abilities as well as "the power of the couple to sustain meaning in the face of adversity" (162). But the arguments are not helped by bold and unelaborated assertions about how "the conditions of Hitchcock's life in America had led him to abandon a Victorian notion of character" (155) and somewhat ungrounded statements about Manny and Scottie and "1950s masculinity in general" (166).

Amy Lawrence's bold argumentation is supported by a more careful marshaling of evidence. She skillfully refutes Hitchcock's claim that *Rope* is essentially a technical tour-de-force by examining it as a powerful meditation on post-World War II guilt and the psychological as well as social disruptions caused by committing and attempting to justify murderous violence, much of this "readable" in James Stewart's face and gestures. Stewart embodies the strains of being both victim and perpetrator, and Lawrence unrelentingly insists on him as the latter, so much so that she sees the climax of *Rope* as forcing the audience to think of Stewart—our self, not the "other"—as a killer, not just a philosophizer. This is a quintessential—and horrifying—Hitchcock moment, one that resonates with our own contemporary (and unresolved) debate about the extent to which words are actions.

The pair of essays at the center of *Hitchcock's America* highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the volume. Freedman's "Hitchcock and Therapeutic Culture in America" lucidly examines Hitchcock's "skeptical take on psychoanalysis, on the psychiatric profession, and, most important, on their cultural ramifications" (79). It is difficult for me to imagine Hitchcock reading Freud, let alone conversing with Adorno at a Hollywood party about their shared contempt for "mass cultural American transformations of psychoanalytic theory" (95). But Freedman very effectively traces Hitchcock's sustained critique of institutionalized therapy and his ever-deepening "appreciation of the unconscious's uncanny power" (96) through fine analyses of *Spellbound* (a film implicated in even as it repudiates the "selling" of psychoanalysis in the 1940s), and *Vertigo,* Hitchcock's most profound intimation of Freud's late meditations on "the inevitability of repetition-compulsion, the interminability of analysis, and the impossibility of cure" (80), and Adorno's somber premise that culture and personality rest, painfully and precariously, on "the abyss of the self" (96). It would be well worth applying Freedman's insights and critical method not only to *Psycho,* an obvious example of Hitchcock's dismissive treatment of formulaic explanations of the often inscrutable and unanalyzable psyche, but also *Marnie,* which took shape through various screenplay drafts that erase and displace the therapeutic process and figure of the analyst that are central in the original novel that Hitchcock was so attracted to.

There is an abrupt transition as we pass from Freedman's carefully argued and clearly written essay on Hitchcock's critique of psychobabble and reductive analysis to Robert J. Corber's "Spectatorship, Ideology, and the 'Homosexual Menace' in *Strangers on a Train,*" which even as it critiques Lacan and Bellour, adopts their often impenetrable language and conceptual framework, and presents Hitchcock in the company of the ideological enforcers of the 1950s. Corber is a shrewd and subtle critic, and some readers will undoubtedly admire his intricate picture of the dynamics of spectatorship which attempt but fail to "insert the male spectator into an Oedipalized subject position" (103) and how this correlates with what he takes to be heterosexual panic over the instability of sexual identity and the fused threat of Communists and homosexuals. (Other readers may agree with me that the most useful analysis of spectatorship in the volume comes in Dana Brand's essay on "Hitchcock, Poe, and the Flaneur," perhaps placed after Corber's as a kind of tonic to his more combustible gin.) But

Corber's complicated methodological apparatus often leads him to what I feel are astonishing overstatements. To take one key example, Corber implicates Hitchcock in a far-reaching ideological strategy that "attribute[s] the crisis over national security to those heterosexual women who resisted returning to the domestic sphere," and states that the film endorses "the castration"—in the terms of the film, the destruction—"of all women who dare to resist confinement" to this sphere (117). It is one thing to argue that we should feel some sympathy for Miriam and shock at her murder, but quite another to envision her by any stretch of the imagination as a positive figure of sexual liberation crushed by patriarchy. Corber's essay usefully confirms that, as a structuring principle in Hitchcock's work, when you scratch a villain you find a victim, the subject of powerful internal and external forces. But to be persuasive as well as provocative, analyses of psychological and socio-political victimization in Hitchcock's films need to be more carefully argued than Corber's.

Contrasting with Corber's essay in almost all ways is Millington's, for me the majestic highpoint of the volume. The recovery of the comic Hitchcock—not just the Hitchcock of practical jokes, wry commentary, and veiled aggressiveness, but of reintegrations, transformations, and accommodations to the inevitable that do not yield to the dead and deadly—is absolutely vital to a comprehensive view of his achievement, and Millington follows the lead of Brill, Naremore, Cavell, and Rothman in analyzing *North by Northwest* as a remarkable "diagnostic and curative narrative" (143). His critical terms are metaphoric but incisive—he speaks about problems of "weightlessness" (145) and the "effigy" rather than crises of interpellation, repression, or ideological containment—and this adds an Emersonian tonality to his consideration of a film that strikes him much like an essay by Emerson or a novel by Henry James. He reads *North by Northwest* as a fable of corporate man and commodified woman rediscovering their bodies, their selves, their love, and their country via wit, improvisation, travel, and trust, and in so doing raises it from a mere action-adventure to the level of *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* as one of the masterpieces of Hitchcock's major phase. And unlike those two, it is a happy masterpiece, one of affirmation, lasting enhancement of the self and the couple, and a beacon for cultural renovation and "the reclamation of 'American character'" (150). Millington by no means ignores the often overwhelming tensions and threats of the American scene, but suggests that this landscape can be a vale of, broadly speaking, soul-making, something Hitchcock was evidently aware of as he helped make Cary Grant the embodiment of the American notion of grace as style under pressure.

Some of my general criticisms of *Hitchcock's America* are substantive. There is little attention paid to the many continuities between his British and American films, which qualify our sense of a distinctive American period and perhaps recommend a consideration of Hitchcock's American inflections rather than separate American thematic. In a slim volume, three of the nine essays have already been published and are easily accessible elsewhere. And although the editors do not claim to offer a comprehensive treatment, Hitchcock's picture of America is far more panoramic than we glimpse in a book that gives no sustained attention to *The Trouble with Harry, Psycho, The Birds,* and *Marnie,* let alone to lesser but still intriguing films such as *Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Saboteur, Lifeboat, I Confess,* and *Torn Curtain.* Still, the volume unquestionably establishes Hitchcock as "an indispensable historian, critic, and analyst of American middle-class culture from the 1940s through the 1970s" (5), and ratifies the importance in general of a socio-historical approach to the films of Hitchcock's major period.

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Ideology of the Hindi Film

A Historical Construction

By Madhava Prasad. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. $24.95.

Madhava Prasad's contribution to the burgeoning area of Indian film studies marshals a panoply of Marxist, political, and film theories about ideology, the Indian state, melodrama, realism, and narrative form to trace the historical construction of Hindi cinema—often presumed to be in a "prolonged state of not-yet-ness" (5). Prasad's project must be marveled at for the mesh of extraordinarily ambitious theoretical frames he sets up in the introduction: Indian films as an epiphenomenon of a (particular precapitalist yet capitalist) mode of production; form and aesthetic as a formal/real subsumption of precapitalist modes; the articulation of a modern Indian state (a coalition between the bourgeois, landlord, and professional class); and an interrogation of the dichotomous tradition-modernity metanarrative that frames Indian cultural theory.

Prasad introduces a Marxist framework to explore the economic-cultural border the Hindi film industry occupies by demonstrating how a non-centralized heterogeneous mode of production determines the narrative, the "feudal family romance"—a textual form that was stable between the 50s and 70s. Set against Janet Staiger's exposition of the Hollywood system, Prasad lays out the centerpiece of his thesis: whereas Hollywood production centers around filming a strong narrative where the story is the blueprint for centralized production, in the Hindi film the story does not subsume other elements—the song, dance, comedy, and "fight" sequences are all of equal importance. These elements produce variety within a "heterogeneous mode of production" paralleling the "putting out system" in capitalism, distinct from Hollywood's centralized production (42-5). Using secondary sources, Fazalbhoy's *Indian Film: A Review* and Barnouw and Krishnaswamy's *Indian Film,* Prasad plots two opposing developments in the Bombay film industry's mode of production and narrative development: one, generic differ-

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entiation under the studio era was replaced by the emergence of a "supra-genre," the "social"; and two, a proliferation of producers displaced the studio system in spite of the growing stranglehold of the distributor-exhibitor nexus.

In his third chapter, Prasad situates the "aesthetic mode" of realism, a form of textual organization, as corresponding to the "in-betweenness of the figure of the citizen . . . an abstract unit of bourgeois polity" (58-9), and the realist text, with its causality, linear progress, and motivation, as that through which "the rationality of the bourgeois world is demonstrated and ratified." (63). David Grimstead's description of early nineteenth-century European and American stage melodrama (in *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture 1800–50,* Chicago University Press, 1968), with its "excessive contrived speech," "idealized extraordinary world," and "moral absolutes," provides Prasad the grid to read Hindi cinema's feudal family romance. For instance, the 60s romantic love stories, he argues, create the illusion of the citizen-subject falling in love, only to discover the preordained marriage the family had set up. Melodrama in the Hindi film enacts the struggle between old and emergent forces, middle-class, democratic, capitalist, individualist, and "foreign" values that are pitted against aristocratic ones, and a threatened feudal family structure that "incorporate[s] consumerism and other 'modern' features without much damage" (67).

Prasad's fourth chapter points to an interesting conundrum in Hindi cinema: the prohibition of kissing, an unwritten rule whose effectiveness is not a simple matter of residual Victorian prudery, since sexualized displays of the female body—a spectacle, an object of scopic pleasure—thrive on the Indian screen. Prasad reads it as prohibiting any representation of the private on a screen deemed to be in the public sphere. Paralleling the formal but not real subsumption of precapitalist modes in the service of capitalism under the aegis of the nation-state, the state allies with the premodern intermediate patriarch to reserve the scopic privilege of the private sphere to itself. On the other hand, "the spectacle of the female body poses no threat to this informal alliance that constitutes the Indian ruling bloc" (97). If this is true, how do we explain the ban on nudity in Hindi films? Surely, some spectacles of the female body do pose a threat to the ruling bloc.

In chapter 5, Prasad historicizes the impact of "disaggregation" caused by the late 60s political upheaval (which was ultimately contained by the "populist authoritarian government"). The film industry responded to the challenge by segmenting into three cinemas: middle, new, and popular, each with distinct aesthetic conventions and modes of production. These, Prasad declares, constitute genres in Indian cinema, thus getting around the problematic of the undifferentiated Hindi film, the so called supra-genre, the "social." Chapters 6, 7, and 8 elaborate on these "genres." Amitabh Bachchan's meteoric rise to superstardom as the angry working man in Salim-Javed's screenplays stands for both the political upheaval and popular cinema's adoption of "narrative values." Prasad's analysis of Bachchan's star iconicity and successful films is fascinating. For example, he reads *Deewar* (Chopra, 1975) as a national "masochistic fantasy"; however, the "subversion" of domination by the dominated is more overt than he suggests. While Bachchan had unprecedented star value, Prasad overstates his centrality to the industry as a whole, the novelty of his films, and their rupture with earlier feudal family romances. The difference introduced by the Bachchan-dominated 70s films really lay in the tenor of their challenge to the class structure, which, though less militant, was equally a part of Raj Kapoor films of the 50s.

Through an analysis of several middle cinema films, Prasad demonstrates how tropes of female desire, sexuality, and political participation, central to the cultural issue of women's subjectivity, threaten to disrupt middle-class domesticity. Women's subjectivity, however, far from being the exclusive preserve of the middle class or cinema, is no less pertinent to other cinemas, especially popular cinema's imaginary of the nation-state and mediation between the contradictory impulses of capitalist/precapitalist forces. In fact, gender as an analytical category is conspicuously absent in Prasad's overall framework.

In chapter 8, Prasad traces a progression from a mere suggestion of revolt against feudal oppression in *Ankur* (Benegal, 1973) to "feudal violence and retaliation" (203), a spectacle of anarchy, in *Nishant* (Benegal, 1975), and ultimately a "developmental aesthetic" in *Manthan* (Benegal, 1976). Prasad's endorsement of this last film, symptomatic of "a state project, meant to serve as propaganda for the developmentalist efforts of the Congress government" (216), is disconcerting, especially in the light of the now well-known excesses of Indira Gandhi's Emergency. Finally, in chapter 9—the weakest because of its lack of sufficient evidence and analysis—and a wholly dispensable coda, Prasad identifies a circular narrative form in two films, *Damini* (Santoshi, 1993) and *Roja* (Ratnam, 1992), that establish the state as the authority for the couple—signs of a new direction Hindi cinema is poised to take.

If the range of concepts Prasad uses to frame a discussion on Hindi cinema are the book's strength, they are also its weakness: his deft textual readings do not map easily onto the theoretical edifice; his general theorization loses its grip on specific film readings. Concepts like state, history, ideology, precapitalist, modern, and traditional are not static, rather, they are shifting and mobile constructs. For example, Prasad defines the state as a coalition between the bourgeois, landlords, and professional class—an important entity to introduce to the territory of film theory. However, Prasad's conceptualization is slippery and the state assumes varying identities: Prasad invokes it at times as a monolithic body, and at other times as a stand-in for the rule of law or state machinery (bureaucracy, law, the army, etc.). As for Prasad's film analysis, while it is engaging, he does not specify his criteria for selecting or excluding films, raising questions about his methodology.

Where he does explicate his Marxist methodology (in chapter 2) to theorize Hindi cinema, deploying a derivative discourse on the Hollywood mode of production, he identifies its brand of realism (often paralleled to Sanskrit

dramaturgy) as a failed movement toward particularistic narratives representing "chunks of real," thus fueling the common perception of Hindi cinema's "not-yet-ness" he initially challenges. His method, deliberately or not, ends up measuring the Hindi film against the invisible yardstick of Hollywood. Further, mapping Hindi cinema onto nineteenth-century Euro-American theatrical melodrama reinforces the idea of Hindi film's realism as that which is yet to arrive.

Prasad's systematic analysis in chapter 2 makes this his most well argued and coherent chapter in the book, along with chapter 6 on the canonized figure of Amitabh Bachchan. However, it hinges on one fundamental premise—that the story is secondary to Hindi cinema production—which is open to contention. While Prasad's thesis about the subordination of the story might certainly be tenable when we consider particular contemporary auteurs and films from the 80s and 90s (e.g., Subhash Ghai), there are too many departures to accept this as a standard and stable mode of Hindi film production between the 50s and 70s. In chapter 3, Prasad emphasizes the importance of dialogue in the feudal family romance. But dialogue/script/screenplay, if anything, are the essence of the story that Prasad elsewhere claims is not critical to (50s-70s) Hindi film production.

Prasad's exceedingly logical and internally consistent paradigm of Hindi cinema requires agreement with his premise that a heterogeneous mode of film production subordinates the narrative and creates uniformity in which "the same cinematic form serves to organize the cinematic spectacle (30)." This is not entirely persuasive: such a claim regarding the Bombay film's mode of production calls for fieldwork-based research rather than analysis of textual sources alone. This notwithstanding, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* is undoubtedly a valuable contribution. It signals an important moment in Indian film studies: a debate on Indian cinema can now begin in earnest.

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In the Company of Women

Contemporary Female Friendship Films

By Karen Hollinger. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. $47.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

The opening paragraph of Karen Hollinger's *In the Company of Women* is a bit alarming: it refers first to a "recent wave of films focusing on friendships between women" and then proceeds to name one film from the 1970s, three films from the 1980s, and one from 1991 as examples of the "enormous popularity" of this "newly created cycle of films specifically addressed to a female audience" (1). Whatever "recent" is supposed to mean here (or, of course, to future readers of her book), it seems a stretch to apply the term to films twenty or even ten years old. Otherwise, however, but for frequent verbatim repetitions of the same remarks and a few typos, *In the Company of Women* is a useful and accessible addition to a growing body of work dealing with women's engagement with ostensibly feminist commercial "mainstream" cinema as well as independent "alternative" productions.

Hollinger approaches the female friendship film and its several subgenres—e.g., sentimental, political, erotic, anti-female—"neither as progressive challenges to the status quo nor as reactionary props of dominant patriarchal ideology, but rather as complex products of an intricate process of negotiation" (6). Her goal is to "examine the complex and multidimensional nature of this negotiation" and discuss the role of "female creative personnel in shaping the visions of these films as well as the interpretive possibilities the films open up for their female viewers" (6). To this end, she first lays out the theoretical parameters of Hollywood's classical "woman's film" and summarizes the major scholarship concerning it. Much like Lucy Fischer's 1989 book *Shot/Countershot,* each of the six subsequent chapters poses one or two Hollywood films against a "nontraditional" film or films (for example, *Personal Best* versus *Desert Hearts, Fried Green Tomatoes* versus *Go Fish* in chapter 5; *The Color Purple* versus *Mi Vida Loca* and *Passion Fish* in chapter 6).

Generally, Hollinger's film analyses are lucid and compelling. Since her discussions center primarily on the narratives of her chosen films, however, with references to extratextual material limited to interviews with filmmakers or quotations from reviews, she has to leave out important variables that might also affect a film's popularity with women. She notes the failure of *Mortal Thoughts,* for example, a 1991 "deadly doll" film with Demi Moore "in almost every scene" (125), to "produce the popular response to *Thelma & Louise*" (133). I can think of any number of (admittedly more elusive and complicated) reasons why audiences stayed away from *Mortal Thoughts,* but given the structural framework Hollinger is working within, she can only refer to the "different spectator-text relationships set up by the two films" and conclude that *Mortal Thoughts* failed "perhaps" because it did not challenge the "patriarchal status quo" and was "much less empowering to female viewers" (133).

One can also argue with her valorization of "polysemy" over "reading against the grain." Hollinger characterizes female friendship films as being "crucially dissimilar" to their predecessor woman's films because in the earlier genre "female viewers were not offered double-voiced discourses that both empowered them and at the same time engineered their accommodation to the patriarchal status quo" (246). These films only "inadvertently" offered "alternative progressive reading possibilities" for the "resisting female viewer" and were meant "overwhelmingly to convince women of the crucial importance of men in their lives" (246). According to this logic, contemporary female friendship films seem to be "better" or "less conservative" than women's films simply because polysemy requires less effort. The spectator doesn't have to "read against the grain," the films "open *themselves* up" (246, italics mine). But since even contemporary female friendship films, Hollinger admits, offer only "progress on a limited and equivocal basis" (247), it is not clear how an "easier" reading strategy is more "feminist."

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Contemporary Female Friendship Films

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The opening paragraph of Karen Hollinger's *In the Company of Women* is a bit alarming: it refers first to a "recent wave of films focusing on friendships between women" and then proceeds to name one film from the 1970s, three films from the 1980s, and one from 1991 as examples of the "enormous popularity" of this "newly created cycle of films specifically addressed to a female audience" (1). Whatever "recent" is supposed to mean here (or, of course, to future readers of her book), it seems a stretch to apply the term to films twenty or even ten years old. Otherwise, however, but for frequent verbatim repetitions of the same remarks and a few typos, *In the Company of Women* is a useful and accessible addition to a growing body of work dealing with women's engagement with ostensibly feminist commercial "mainstream" cinema as well as independent "alternative" productions.

Hollinger approaches the female friendship film and its several subgenres—e.g., sentimental, political, erotic, anti-female—"neither as progressive challenges to the status quo nor as reactionary props of dominant patriarchal ideology, but rather as complex products of an intricate process of negotiation" (6). Her goal is to "examine the complex and multidimensional nature of this negotiation" and discuss the role of "female creative personnel in shaping the visions of these films as well as the interpretive possibilities the films open up for their female viewers" (6). To this end, she first lays out the theoretical parameters of Hollywood's classical "woman's film" and summarizes the major scholarship concerning it. Much like Lucy Fischer's 1989 book *Shot/Countershot,* each of the six subsequent chapters poses one or two Hollywood films against a "nontraditional" film or films (for example, *Personal Best* versus *Desert Hearts, Fried Green Tomatoes* versus *Go Fish* in chapter 5; *The Color Purple* versus *Mi Vida Loca* and *Passion Fish* in chapter 6).

Generally, Hollinger's film analyses are lucid and compelling. Since her discussions center primarily on the narratives of her chosen films, however, with references to extratextual material limited to interviews with filmmakers or quotations from reviews, she has to leave out important variables that might also affect a film's popularity with women. She notes the failure of *Mortal Thoughts,* for example, a 1991 "deadly doll" film with Demi Moore "in almost every scene" (125), to "produce the popular response to *Thelma & Louise*" (133). I can think of any number of (admittedly more elusive and complicated) reasons why audiences stayed away from *Mortal Thoughts,* but given the structural framework Hollinger is working within, she can only refer to the "different spectator-text relationships set up by the two films" and conclude that *Mortal Thoughts* failed "perhaps" because it did not challenge the "patriarchal status quo" and was "much less empowering to female viewers" (133).

One can also argue with her valorization of "polysemy" over "reading against the grain." Hollinger characterizes female friendship films as being "crucially dissimilar" to their predecessor woman's films because in the earlier genre "female viewers were not offered double-voiced discourses that both empowered them and at the same time engineered their accommodation to the patriarchal status quo" (246). These films only "inadvertently" offered "alternative progressive reading possibilities" for the "resisting female viewer" and were meant "overwhelmingly to convince women of the crucial importance of men in their lives" (246). According to this logic, contemporary female friendship films seem to be "better" or "less conservative" than women's films simply because polysemy requires less effort. The spectator doesn't have to "read against the grain," the films "open *themselves* up" (246, italics mine). But since even contemporary female friendship films, Hollinger admits, offer only "progress on a limited and equivocal basis" (247), it is not clear how an "easier" reading strategy is more "feminist."

Certainly Hollinger's characterizations of the past could be complicated by more attention to historical and industrial context, or to the more overtly schizophrenic extratextual discourse common to fan magazines, for example.

But these quibbles aside, *In the Company of Women* is a solid book that would work particularly well on the undergraduate level. Whether or not one agrees with all of its claims, they lend themselves easily to discussion and argument, and are likely to spark not only debate among students but future scholarly work on these films as well.

Adrienne L. McLean teaches at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Reality Transformed

Film as Meaning and Technique

By Irving Singer. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998. $27.95.

In this book, Irving Singer, professor of philosophy at MIT, takes on the familiar debate between realist and formalist theories of film and argues for a synthesis of the two in what he calls a theory of the transformation of reality. Singer argues that realism and formalism must complement each other. As he writes, when viewing films "we view the world and its reality, but only through transformations that could not occur without the formalist techniques a filmmaker introduces to convey the thoughts, the feelings, and the overall attitudes expressed in his or her conception" (11). After developing a general argument, Singer analyzes three films—*The Purple Rose of Cairo, Death in Venice,* and *The Rules of the Game*—to illustrate his claims about the nature of the film medium. For example, after arguing that film is more than a visual medium, Singer analyzes *Death in Venice* to show that the film fails due to Visconti's insistence on communicating through the visual alone. Singer's interpretation of *The Rules of the Game* is meant to illustrate an antithesis between the human and the technical, and to show that film spectatorship involves both communication and alienation.

One might question the need for a replay of the realist/formalist debate, especially since V.F. Perkins disposed of rigid realist and formalist theories of film in *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies,* published over 25 years ago. Perkins argues for the same kind of synthesis Singer calls for, but Singer is apparently unaware of Perkins' work, since it is neither mentioned nor cited. One gets the sense that Singer's knowledge of the existing literature in film and media studies is spotty at best. On the perception of film, for example, he critiques Christian Metz, but neglects the work of more contemporary scholars—e.g., Joseph Anderson, Paul Messaris, and Stephen Prince—with which he would find more agreement.

Singer attends to classical film theorists such as Munsterberg and Metz, and also to contemporary philosophers, among them Stanley Cavell and Kendall Walton. His critiques of Cavell and Walton on photographic realism are convincing. Along the way, Singer also forwards some provocative arguments about films and the film medium. Among these is his claim that while film is seductive and powerful, it "thoroughly induces a hidden and corresponding alienation" (136) because the spectator can interact with neither the characters nor the performers. As Singer notes, Walter Benjamin celebrated this loss of presentness, but Singer prefers to describe it as remoteness and isolation. He writes that the "mechanized relationship" of spectator to screen is "inhuman." Great films, he writes, "are those in which the problems created by this situation get resolved in a transaction that is inherently consummatory" (147).

Singer's book examines ideas that have been much explored. His own are either not especially innovative or insufficiently developed. On a more positive note, the book pulls contemporary philosophers into the fray in interesting ways, and proposes some new ways of thinking. In addition, *Reality Transformed* is clearly and eloquently written throughout.

Carl Plantinga is Director of the Master's Program in Screenwriting and Film Studies at Hollins University.

Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film

By Carl R. Plantinga. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. $59.95.

Documentary film theory has enjoyed a renaissance in the 1990s as major volumes and essays by such writers as Noël Carroll, Bill Nichols, Carl Plantinga, Michael Renov, and Brian Winston have pushed the level of conceptual debate to new levels of sophistication—and belligerence. Arguments over the nature of documentary truth and objectivity, photographic representation, and the ideological consequences of film technique have made the "rhetoric of the image," in Barthes's phrase, a contentious and often confusing conceptual field. These debates are further complicated by rapid changes in documentary production, distribution, and reception transformed by the rise of digital imagery and the proliferation of nonfiction cable and broadcast television programming. Carl Plantinga's *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film* is a welcome intervention, a book whose clarity of reasoning, writing, and organization make it the best starting point thus far for any reader interested in understanding the basic issues of documentary film theory.[1] Even if it should not be (as Plantinga himself says) the last word on the subject, and even as the book is flawed by residues of the contentious field it surveys—the powder burns of the battles between the so-called postmodern and cognitivist documentary camps—Plantinga's volume is so sensible that it runs the risk of being ignored within its polemical arena.

The book is most valuable in undercutting some persistent fallacies of documentary film theory and criticism. First, Plantinga offers, with perhaps more clarity than any other documentary theorist, a definition of nonfiction distinguishing it from fiction. Nonfiction has no intrinsic or

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essential quality; rather, it forms a category with what, borrowing from Searle and Lakoff, Plantinga calls "fuzzy boundaries": "the concept has no essence, but rather a braid of family resemblances." The decisive "family resemblance" is taken from Nicholas Wolterstorff's notion of the "projected worlds" that representational works evoke. When we watch fiction, we are asked to take a "fictive stance" toward the "state of affairs" projected; fiction, of course, comments on or is analogous to reality, but we do not take its state of affairs to be actual. For nonfiction worlds, "the typical stance taken is *assertive*; the states of affairs represented are asserted to occur in the actual world as portrayed." What finally distinguishes fiction from nonfiction is how spectators are invited to approach the state of affairs in the projected world. Both the indexing of the nonfiction and its reception are crucial. For Plantinga, documentary definition is social, dynamic, and flexible, not merely textual; what is at stake are the assertions about *reality,* not an imagined world, that nonfiction films make.

This definition also clarifies a second fallacy of documentary theory, the misleading notion that documentaries are fictions because they are constructed. For Plantinga, it is a "mistake . . . to equate the manipulation of materials with fiction." Rather, documentary, like fiction filmmaking, enjoys access to a full range of "expressive techniques" used to shape the diegesis and rhetoric of the film. By making the constructedness of the film irrelevant to its fictional or nonfictional *status,* Plantinga can privilege equally film's photographic realism *and* its rhetorical power of manipulable imagery and sound: "'recording' and 'interpretation' are not necessarily antithetical." In two chapters which review and clarify what special truth claims can be made for the photographic image, he usefully revisits Peirce's terms, the "icon" and the "index." Plantinga calls himself a "critical realist," and preserves the *potential* capacity of the photographic to function as evidence (although he less successfully accounts for the photograph's affect): "referentiality must be preserved in our theoretical discourse about film." Plantinga then devotes four chapters to documentary "discourse," the parameters of structure, shooting strategies, editing, voiceover, and music in addition to selection, order, and emphasis. He suggests a heuristic division between "formal," "open," and (less convincingly) "poetic" nonfiction "voices," where voice is the "tone and attitude" of the perspective which presents a projected world. The formal voice concentrates on "explanation . . . with a high degree of epistemic authority"; the open voice is "epistemically hesitant" and "observes or explores." Here, he finds useful common ground with Bill Nichols in their mutual embrace of rhetoric as a critical tool.

Following from documentary's discursive nature is Plantinga's discrediting of a third fallacy: the idea that style necessarily marks a documentary's truth value or ideological resonance. Plantinga takes issue with political criticism which has in the past attempted to find, say, an inherently reactionary quality to Griersonian voice-of God narration, or an inherently progressive quality to the "open voice." Style, while not neutral, is also neither a guarantee nor a damnation for progressive political argument. Plantinga's own horizon of democratic and "emancipatory social discourse" is based on Habermas's notion of a "healthy" human intersubjectivity. Ideological evaluation must be based on rhetorical terms that take into account actual historical conditions of production, distribution, and reception; Plantinga takes particular exception to what he considers the exaggerated claims made for reflexivity as a progressive textual practice isolated from these conditions.

In his final chapter, Plantinga defends the controversial concept of journalistic objectivity, a defence possible where objectivity is not a cartoon of absolute truth but based on relative and intersubjective standards of assertion. As he acknowledges, absolute objectivity—a discourse without perspective—is impossible. "Relative objectivity," in which perspective is acknowledged but constrained by systematic evidence and multiple "perspective-relative accounts," is "possible and desirable." Using Stuart Hall's analysis of media institutions, Plantinga first convincingly examines the abuses of "objectivity, balance, impartiality, professionalism, and consensus" as "smokescreens for biases and a subtle hegemony" in CBS's *The Twentieth Century* (1957-66) and its pro-American and pro-military take on public history. However, he then argues that, despite their potential for abuse, these concepts should not be dismissed. For him, journalism that abandons any aspiration to objectivity, balance, and impartiality would be subject to overt bias, and unconstrained by any epistemological standards of comprehensiveness, independent security of assertion, and supportiveness of evidence.[2] Plantinga is ultimately fallibilist in relation to truth; he asks that "we think of 'truths' or 'approximate truth,' always fallible, partial at best, finally inadequate, and subject to revision."

One problem with his focus, especially in the conclusion, on nonfiction's truth-telling function is that it overwhelms those aspects of nonfiction less concerned with objectivity than with subjective experience, e.g., the diary film, whose main "function" is the presentation of first-person experience for which the test of truth-telling is almost irrelevant. Nichols' infamous observation that documentary is aligned with "discourses of sobriety" comes to mind as a legacy of this emphasis, potentially devaluing those nonfiction forms like satire or essay which have a more playful or speculative relationship to viewers and their "entertainment" of propositions about the world.

For example, Plantinga makes a compelling comparison between Emile de Antonio's "scathing mockery" of Richard Nixon in *Milhouse: A White Comedy* and Rush Limbaugh's "undermining tactics" of attack on Bill Clinton. However, when Plantinga questions whether we should celebrate *Milhouse* "as a prototype for the new preferred journalism" of non-objectivity, he becomes prescriptive. First, the explicit bias of *Milhouse,* while it may not conform to objectivity's standard of balance, need not undermine its command of supportiveness of evidence or comprehensiveness of argument. Biased arguments may still be *rationally* persuasive. Moreover, need there be a single prototype of persuasive non-

fiction? On the one hand, as Plantinga's heralding of open and poetic voice suggests, he does not think so either. And the public and institutional nature of journalism demands that standards of objectivity, balance, and impartiality be acknowledged there. On the other hand, surely the messy, explicitly biased, and muck-raking practices of much guerilla documentary can contribute to a vital climate of debate and intellectual play in which extreme, explicitly biased formulations are worthwhile—if only, perhaps, to highlight the importance of reasoned argument. Plantinga concludes his discussion of objectivity with the sensible admonition that "the proper strategy for now is to continue to expose the relative, intersubjective nature of objectivity, balance, and impartiality, and consensus. Thus we can highlight their weaknesses, while preserving the benefits their use brings to a specific type of journalistic discourse." However, I trust that not every documentary film need necessarily strive for objectivity, balance, and impartiality.

Plantinga's methodology, rooted in "pragmatics and rhetoric," is simultaneously a strength and a limitation. The book is strongest in laying the ground for a conceptually constructive documentary criticism. His approach describes the functional way in which most of us, I think, understand and deal with the plethora of nonfiction film and video around us, much of it startlingly ordinary. One way in which his work (and that of theorists like Noël Carroll and Dirk Eitzen) distinguishes itself from work by Nichols and Renov is in the choice of documentary texts to examine: instead of examining the radical traditions of documentary work—films which push the boundaries of avant-garde film, video art, and ethnographic film—Plantinga's case study is a TV documentary classic, *The Twentieth Century*. The weakness of this approach is evident when Plantinga tries to account for avant-garde or what he calls "poetic" or "aesthetic" work: although his categories are defensible, they are less illuminating than other, perhaps less systematic, critical tools. Plantinga describes his book as an "alternative to the dominant postmodernist and poststructuralist theories of nonfiction film," but it also seems simply to derive from a different set of films and concerns. The different methodologies at play in nonfiction theory and criticism mobilize and arm different missions of criticism, all of which have their limitations and strengths in relation to different critical questions.

The book is weakest when it attacks the "existing theoretical paradigms" of documentary film theory in an overgeneralized fashion. Too often formulations such as the following appear: "Contemporary theorists have privileged the reflexive film as superior not only for its aesthetic qualities, but for its political effects. . . . " Which theorist and in what context? At these points in the book, I would have preferred a more systematic outlining of the "dominant" position he is attacking and then a specific refutation. Although there is much with which to take issue in much contemporary documentary film theory, some of Plantinga's attacks smack of straw man arguments. Although such a project of systematic refutation is probably beyond the scope of Plantinga's book, his broad-stroke attacks on "contemporary theory" and on "postmodernist" and "poststructuralist" positions ignore their diversity and far-from-stable configuration.

Most admirably—and perhaps the way in which he most eloquently rises above his contemporaries—Plantinga wisely understands the limits of his own theoretical enterprise, even as he clears necessary conceptual ground:

The poetic, open, and formal voices all have significant capabilities and potential liabilities. However, none is inherently superior to the other; none is necessarily either ideologically progressive or pernicious. These determinations cannot be made by theory alone, but only after considerations of individual instances, in light of a theoretical understanding of nonfiction film. If "theory" by itself cannot make sweeping ideological judgements about the formal characteristics of film discourse, so be it. Call in criticism, and history, to further the task.

I hope that Plantinga takes up his own call. One current glaring gap in documentary writing is an introductory textbook on documentary form. I cannot think of a better conceptual foundation for such a volume than *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film.*

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Notes

1. Although Plantinga prefers the term nonfiction film, I will continue to respect common usage and discuss "documentary." Indeed, one flaw of Plantinga's account is that he attempts to subsume what is usually understood as experimental or avant-garde film under "nonfiction"; while technically defensible, his chapter on the poetic voice is the weakest in the book, as his critical strength lies in documentary's functions as information and assertion.
2. These terms are taken from Susan Haack, *Evidence and inquiry: towards reconstruction in epistemology* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1995).

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film

Hollywood and Beyond

By Robin Wood. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. $49.50 cloth; $19.50 paper.

Robin Wood announces *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film* as his "last book of film criticism." His provocative, rich, and humane writings on cinema will be missed. Readers familiar with his previous books on Hollywood, Hitchcock, and auteurs of world cinema know of Wood's dual convictions: his love of cinema and his loathing of contemporary society. In this latest volume those often-warring tendencies remain in evidence. Wood offers radical rereadings of some two dozen "classics" (ranging from *Sunrise* to *Persona*) and unmitigated praise for a handful of recent independent films (Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise*, Gregg Araki's *The Doom Generation*, and two obscure Canadian features, *Life Classes*

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Notes

1. Although Plantinga prefers the term nonfiction film, I will continue to respect common usage and discuss "documentary." Indeed, one flaw of Plantinga's account is that he attempts to subsume what is usually understood as experimental or avant-garde film under "nonfiction"; while technically defensible, his chapter on the poetic voice is the weakest in the book, as his critical strength lies in documentary's functions as information and assertion.
2. These terms are taken from Susan Haack, *Evidence and inquiry: towards reconstruction in epistemology* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1995).

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film

Hollywood and Beyond

By Robin Wood. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. $49.50 cloth; $19.50 paper.

Robin Wood announces *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film* as his "last book of film criticism." His provocative, rich, and humane writings on cinema will be missed. Readers familiar with his previous books on Hollywood, Hitchcock, and auteurs of world cinema know of Wood's dual convictions: his love of cinema and his loathing of contemporary society. In this latest volume those often-warring tendencies remain in evidence. Wood offers radical rereadings of some two dozen "classics" (ranging from *Sunrise* to *Persona*) and unmitigated praise for a handful of recent independent films (Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise*, Gregg Araki's *The Doom Generation*, and two obscure Canadian features, *Life Classes*

and *Loyalties*). The choice of films is admittedly arbitrary and "wildly heterogeneous." But this is not a collection of disparate essays. The pieces inform one another to an impressive degree. Although wide-ranging, the book constitutes a deliberate critical project: the author's longtime analysis of films that inspire resistance to culturally ingrained notions of romance, marriage and family.

"I aspire," writes Wood, "to the almost lost status of the critic," one who "engages passionately with specific works and arrives at value judgments." He bluntly lays out his evaluative criteria and political concerns in an introductory essay, "Fascism/Cinema," and devotes the remainder of the book to elucidating "great films" by "great artists." Greatness is measured by the melding of political efficacy with the personal engagement generated by well-wrought narrative. For Wood, films as different as George Cukor's *Gaslight* and Jacques Rivette's *Céline and Julie Go Boating* earn distinction when (a) their "sexual politics" expose the "social/ideological mechanisms which determine our oppression," and (b) they tell stories involving characters with which the viewer can find pleasurable points of identification. This seems a tall order to fill, but Wood argues for an array of candidates. He discusses them in two broad categories: classic movies that reveal the problems of life in patriarchal capitalist society, and radical works that point "toward liberation," films suggesting revolutionary change.

The most striking aspects of *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film* are the ostensible incongruities among the book's three sections and the author's ability to (almost) sustain his radical interpretive proposition across them. Consider the formidable task for the critic who argues the following three assertions are simultaneously true. First, mainstream cinema exhibits dangerous "fascist tendencies" because it is an expression of Western culture, whose central institutions—nation, commerce, courtship, marriage, family—are rooted in systems of authoritarian domination, violence, racism, and patriarchal oppression. (*Star Wars* is the aesthetic and political cognate of *Triumph of the Will*.) Second, films created by insightful artists reveal and undermine these tendencies. The historical oppression of women, for example, is laid bare in studio productions such as Max Ophuls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman,* Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu,* Ozu's *Late Spring,* and Cukor's *Gaslight*. Such masterpieces do not need to be "read against the grain" to find oppositional meaning. (Leo McCarey comedies urge an insurgent rethinking of the nuclear family.) Third, recent independent films occasionally offer hope for change in an otherwise bleak world. At their best, they show characters not bound by traditional, repressive notions of romantic coupling and sexual fealty. (*The Doom Generation* culminates with the rape/castration/murder of a young man who is part of a desperado ménage à trois. This devastating tale is a hopeful sign for a cinema of true liberation.)

Taken collectively, the 16 chapters which are so "single-mindedly concerned with sexual politics" have a general coherence, if only because Wood so clearly articulates a Marxist critique of contemporary social structures while he so dearly loves each of movie he explores. However, his argument about what constitutes a "radical" film includes gaping contradictions that frustrate the project. Wood admits to these difficulties, but proposes that his dilemma might be akin to the contradictory radical/conservative elements at play in Jean Renoir's "supreme achievement," *The Rules of the Game*. An essay, like a film, "might be coherently incoherent, though . . . difficult to distinguish from the merely confused. One must not deny the artist [or the critic] the right to orchestrate his own uncertainties and hesitations."

Sometimes Wood's "orchestration" is compelling, even beautiful. His lengthy (if meandering) appreciation of the intricate character relations in *Rules of the Game* flows aptly into a "Defense of 'Promiscuity,'" in which the author's own advocacy for sexual freedom finds a sympathetic expression in cinematic form. Then, in a surprising but appropriate final movement, Wood draws a parallel reading out of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. "Mozart's 'immorality'" derives from the opera's coupling and re-coupling of lovers who "come dangerously close," he argues, to believing that "the concept of the 'couple' is itself absurdly restrictive and oppressive." Wood's concluding words are powerful: "these works raise issues—or better, *feelings*—that our culture is still afraid to confront. They would undermine its very foundations[!?]."

A provocative notion, but upon stepping away from the essay's internal logic, the conclusion is undercut by the writer's own "uncertainties." Have the works of Renoir and Mozart (or Hollywood) not been embraced by Western culture? Rather than failing to confront feelings generated by the contradictions of sexual desire vs. marital fidelity. haven't Western art and popular culture dealt with them continually, from Mozart to Renoir, from *Casablanca* and *Sunrise* to *The Bridges of Madison County*?

Certainly Wood acknowledges as much, but he often vacillates between saying "most movies endorse our authoritarian culture" and "these great movies liberate us by exposing our oppression." Many of the films he affirms are precisely the ones that have been endorsed and canonized—*Rules of the Game, Persona, Tokyo Story, Letter from an Unknown Woman,* subversive? A conservative might review Wood's canon quite favorably (*Mandingo* and *Doom Generation* excepted).

At the heart of this gap between his desire for revolution and his acclamation of non-radical films is a paradox: Wood the radical often uses the evaluative criteria of a humanist. His approach is auteurist, crediting individual creativity and transcendence in extraordinarily unabashed terms. Consider: *My Love Has Been Burning* is "among Mizoguchi's dozen or so masterpieces (has any other filmmaker given us so many?)." David MacGillivray's film *Life Classes,* "belongs to the world. . . . MacGillivray is a profoundly honest person tackling issues of immense international cultural significance gently and unpretentiously." And, the "achievement" of *Rules of the Game* arises "from its creator's whole being, and its expression (possible only because he was a great artist) in every aspect of the creation." At its best, this auteurist analysis delivers insightful, historically grounded

accounts of significant bodies of work. Chief among these are his affectionate assessment of Yasujiro Ozu's humanistic, proto-feminist films starring Setsuko Hara, an account of the shifting periods in Kenji Mizoguchi's directing career, and an interesting but dubious case for Leo McCarey as a "major artist," an "undervalued" "American primitive" whose subversive genius was unintentional.

Also working against the book's persuasive force are stylistic problems. Wood applies his penchant for hyperbole not only to directors, but to stars (Ingrid Bergman gives "surely one of the great performances of the Hollywood, or any other, cinema"), individual films, scenes, and even single shots (*Make Way for Tomorrow*'s ending "must surely be numbered among the greatest closing shots in the entire history of cinema"). Too often he refers to such moments without describing them, assuming our familiarity with even obscure films. At times the essays devolve into disjointed lists. Wood is effective when laying out his political assumptions in this way, but not when pieces like the one on *Before Sunrise* consist of "some loosely interconnected and often tentative probes." Tentativeness has its place, but doesn't substantiate conclusions as definitive as "this film belongs among the dozen or so that exemplify 'cinema' at its finest." It is a pleasure to see a venerable cineaste excited by new work, but one hopes for a more developed line of thought, especially in a swan song.

Ultimately, however, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film* is a commendable collection. It brings together and updates provocative ideas by a major critic. The book's primary value may well be pedagogical. Wood values and discusses his students' reactions to particular works, and it is obvious that his contentious interpretations stimulate rich discussion. Polemics such as "*Mandingo*: The Vindication of an Abused Masterpiece" will no doubt continue to stir classroom debate on important issues. Is this 1975 slavery melodrama "the greatest Hollywood film about race" since 1943's *I Walked with a Zombie*? Is *Before Sunrise,* in which Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy have an affair to remember during their brief encounter in Vienna, really a major rethinking of traditional romance? —or simply (as Wood says of another film) "a 'liberal' movie that . . . lends itself very readily to 'radical' appropriation"? Which films liberate and which oppress?

Though the author mischaracterizes film scholarship as a field which has not appreciated his maverick work, such questions are hardly alien to contemporary cinema studies. Robin Wood helped raise them for at least two generations of scholars and students, helping us take Hitchcock and other mainstream filmmakers seriously. His influential "Ideology/Genre/Auteur" was the first critical essay I encountered as an undergraduate. The political meaning of *Mandingo* was being debated when I entered graduate studies nearly 15 years ago. My students have read Wood on Hitchcock and will now be reading *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film.* Its judgments are open to debate, but the book raises the questions we should continue to ask about movies from Hollywood and beyond.

Dan Streible teaches at the University of South Carolina.

Transcultural Cinema

By David MacDougall, edited and with an introduction by Lucien Taylor. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, $59.50, cloth; $18.95 paper.

David MacDougall is perhaps the most thoughtful and stimulating writer in all of visual anthropology. His essays, which have been appeared in widely scattered publications, have always been well organized, thoroughly researched, and clearly expressed. He is one of the few ethnographic filmmakers who has pondered in prose the philosophical ramifications of his filmic practices. The publication of his previous writings along with three new essays in the volume *Transcultural Cinema* is therefore an event to be celebrated. Taken as a whole, these reworked and well-integrated essays make a singular contribution to visual studies. What's more, the value of the Lucien Taylor's provocative introduction to the volume extends its value. The detailed introduction elegantly situates MacDougall's work in the stream of film studies, visual anthropology, and general anthropology. Taylor demonstrates the ongoing connection between what MacDougall writes and what he films by acquainting the reader with the style, evolution, and themes—both narrative and intellectual—that are embedded in his films. Taylor also highlights the problem (underscored sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely in the essays) of linguification: the tendency to reduce image, data, and discourse to linguistic components—a major weakness, I should add, in anthropological theorization. By the end of the introduction, the essays have been thoroughly framed and intellectually situated.

The essays consider three distinct issues in visual studies: (1) the position of ethnographic film among documentarians and anthropologists; (2) the relation of filmic practice to issues of representation; and (3) photographic representation. The first issue has been knocked about for more than 20 years, though MacDougall's voice is among the freshest. The second issue is not so much under-represented as poorly expressed in the literature. Here MacDougall's essays are fresh and engaging. Many anthropologists, especially Christopher Pinney and Jay Ruby, have discussed the third issue, but MacDougall's orientation is quite original.

The volume consists of 13 chapters divided into three parts. In Parts One and Two, MacDougall considers the philosophical dimensions of representation—ethnographic or otherwise. One finds in these sections such well-known previously published essays as "The Subjective Voice in Ethnographic Film," "Beyond Observational Cinema," "Complicities of Style," "Whose Story Is It?" In Part Three, MacDougall focuses on the more technical aspects of his filmic practices. Although the constraints of space prohibit detailed descriptions of the essays in the collection, I would like to focus on three of the new essays, each of which make significant contributions of social thought.

"Visual Anthropology and the Ways of Knowing," written in 1995, should be required reading for all students in anthropology and film studies. The essay encompasses much

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of MacDougall's thinking over the past 20 years; in fact, it transcends what he has written in the past to consider epistemologically the nature of the visual. Here MacDougall argues quite eloquently that the visual is a powerful way of constructing and expressing theoretical arguments, that images are more than merely complements to the written word. "The Fate of the Cinema Subject" is a nuanced reflection on visual perception and the dynamics of intersubjectivity. Using the framework of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology, MacDougall attempts—and in large measure succeeds—to describe the complex wonder of what happens when filmmakers film others. At the end of this important essay, MacDougall asks some stimulating questions about human consciousness:

> Our consciousness provides the immediate stage upon which our known and unconscious desires are played out, but we ask questions about it for which there are no definitive answers. Where are the boundaries between another consciousness and my own? Why am I not the other experiencing self, and the other not me? If we belong to the same phenomenon, why separately and not jointly? Are we perhaps simultaneously—but independently—touching parts of a single, unified field? . . . Film provides an analogy for such a unified field (56).

In the title essay, "Transcultural Cinema," MacDougall ventures beyond the Eurocentric limits of epistemology to confront the philosophical implications of contemporary transculturalism. MacDougall considers the transcultural as a limitless conceptual arena in which cosmopolitan travelers continuously traverse cultural boundaries. For MacDougall, the transcultural is, in essence, transcendent, a vital idea for future anthropologies. In discussing a well-known photograph of a Nuer boy published in Evans-Pritchard's classic ethnography, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande,* he wonders how the average person observing the photo would interpret it. Would he or she wonder if the boy were Nuer, Dinka or Teso? MacDougall writes:

> For most people such questions pale beside the presence in the photograph of the person. . . . We might say, in fact, that the content of the photograph is overwhelmingly physical and psychological before it is cultural. It therefore transcends "culture" in a way that most written ethnographies do not—both by subordinating cultural differences to other, more visible contents (including other kinds of differences such as physical ones) and by underscoring commonalties which cut across cultural boundaries. In contrast to ethnographic writing, this transculturality is a dominant feature of ethnographic films and photographs (252),

The essay goes on to demonstrate the full epistemological potential of film in anthropology—an admirable and important achievement.

In summary, the essays make a set of substantial and important contributions to both film studies and anthropology. They speak with a nuanced sophistication to the issue of representation. They also take our knowledge of discourse beyond the linguistic—a long overdue and important advance that contributes to recent moves in anthropology toward an epistemology of embodied sensuousness. In short, they point the way toward a new consciousness of the visual.

Paul Stoller teaches in the Department of Anthropology at West Chester University.

Undressing Cinema

Clothing and Identity in the Movies

By Stella Bruzzi. London: Routledge, 1997. $75.00 cloth; $19.99 paper.

The annual Academy Awards make obvious the alliances between film and fashion. In preparation for the ceremony, attendees search for the perfect ensemble in order to attract attention to further their own careers; similarly, designers compete for attendees' commitments to wear their creations for the free publicity generated by the star-gazing press. It seems that each year the media attention given to the fashions worn by Academy Awards attendees grows, as does the complexity of the relationship between film and fashion.

Stella Bruzzi takes on the complexity of the relationship between film and fashion in *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* and further complicates it by adding gender and identity construction to the mix. In her analysis, Bruzzi approaches clothing and cinema interdisciplinarily: she draws from, challenges, and reconfigures theories of fashion and costume, gender and sexuality, psychoanalysis and film. Building on this diverse theoretical framework, Bruzzi discusses and evaluates costume in films primarily from the 1980s and 1990s, illustrating her assertions with films that push the boundaries of representation. The premise of *Undressing Cinema* is that "clothing exists as a discourse not wholly dependent on the structures of narrative and character for signification" (xvi). The result of Bruzzi's efforts is a richly complex and inarguably thorough discussion of the ways in which gender construction is achieved by and through clothing; and just as Bruzzi develops her arguments from an interdisciplinary foundation, her work proves valuable for diverse areas of scholarship.

Undressing Cinema consists of seven chapters organized into three parts which are structured to increasingly problematize the relationships between clothing and the body. Part I, "Dressing Up," focuses on the ways in which clothing has been used and understood in film. In chapter 1, "Cinema and Haute Couture," Bruzzi makes distinctions between costume designers and couturiers (high fashion designers) and the clothing they design for films: costume designers' clothing serves the purposes of film narratives while couturiers create clothing for spectacle (3). With the designs produced by Jean Paul Gaultier for *Kika,* Bruzzi advances her assertion that clothing need not be associated with a character or body to acquire significance, and suggests that Gaultier's designs disrupt the film's narrative by, at times, speaking directly against the narrative. Bruzzi concludes that clothing is capable of working as a discourse in film by speaking directly to the spectator without relation to film narratives.

In "Desire and the Costume Film," Bruzzi explores the fetish in relation to historical romances, and distinguishes the purposes of the clothing in these films: clothing is meant to be looked through or at. She asserts that period costumes conceived to be looked at symbolize eroticism and work to heighten sexual tension. Using *The Piano* as an example, Bruzzi explains that far from making her simply the object of male desire, Ada's costumes signify her desire for Baines and allow her to participate in the "clothes dialogue" he initiates. Further, Bruzzi uses *The Piano* to show that when the traditional male gaze is replaced with a female one, the desire to close the gap between the fetish and the desired sexual object increases. Again, Bruzzi supports her argument that costumes can create an independent dialogue with the spectator.

In the second part of the book, "Gender," Bruzzi examines three genres of film that highlight the relationships between dress and gender and challenge established stereotypes: gangster films, black cinema, and film noir. In "The Instabilities of the Franco-American Gangster," Bruzzi counters the notion that men's clothing is purely functional and thus unworthy of examination with reference to the gangster's incredible narcissism and preoccupation with accessories and details. Importantly, Bruzzi describes the ways in which gangster films, such as *Goodfellas* and *Casino,* have portrayed the fall of the traditional gangster. Gangsters in these films lose their power when they lose their wardrobe, which suggests that masculinity is as much a performative act as is femininity.

"The Screen's Fashioning of Blackness" builds on Bruzzi's analysis of men's clothing and complicates it with the addition of subcultural and racial identification. Blaxploitation films are Bruzzi's beginning point, which she isolates to again argue for the significance of clothing to male characters. Bruzzi contrasts the flashy clothing of blaxploitation films with that of 1980s and 1990s "home-boy" films like *Boyz N the Hood* and *New Jack City,* which she asserts function independently of characters and narratives. Noting that few objects appropriated by black dress are arbitrary, Bruzzi focuses on the ways in which black clothing is positioned against mainstream society and thus constitutes the validation and rearticulation of racial identity.

In the last chapter in Part II, "Clothes, Power and the Modern *Femme Fatale,*" Bruzzi examines how the modern femme fatale uses clothing to challenge the notions that "power and sex in a woman is a destructive, mutually exclusive combination and that women who dress in anything other than a functional way do so with male eyes and a male audience in mind" (144). *The Last Seduction*'s modern femme fatale, Bridget, is successful, devious, and sexy; yet she retains control of her image and rejects a submissive sexual

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role. Bridget, like other modern femme fatales, disrupts the assumption that women are interpretable based upon their clothing, and thus supports Bruzzi's notion that clothing in film works as a discourse capable of speaking independently of the body.

The final part of *Undressing Cinema,* "Beyond Gender," continues the interrogation of assumptions about the connections between clothing and the body by exploring correlations between gender and clothing through two forms of transvestism in film: cross-dressing and androgyny. In "The Comedy of Cross-Dressing," Bruzzi uses mainstream depictions of cross-dressing, like *Tootsie* and *Mrs Doubtfire,* to show that although cross-dressing disrupts the correspondence between the body and social appearance, in some instances wearing the clothes of the opposite sex reinforces gender codes instead of undermining them. Bruzzi contrasts these films with independent films such as *Glen or Glenda* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert,* and argues that these films restore pleasure to the practice of cross-dressing and simultaneously use clothing to examine the tensions of sexuality bypassed by their Hollywood counterparts. These representations demonstrate the ways in which clothing powerfully provides signs and clues through which the body can be read—even in opposition to its "true sex."

This notion is extended by Bruzzi's final chapter, "The Erotic Strategies of Androgyny," in which she argues that the androgyne is a more destabilizing and erotically charged image than the cross-dresser because the androgyne blurs the distinctions between gender binaries. Thus Orlando in *Orlando,* and her/his complete disinterest in gender categories, is an eroticized character in part because s/he makes obvious the simplicity with which one can use clothes to make others believe the gendered images with which they are presented. It is with the androgyne, therefore, that the processes through which clothing works with the body to construct identity are at their most disrupted and most fluid.

Stella Bruzzi's examination of the intersections among film, clothing, and identity in *Undressing Cinema* produces a thoughtful and detailed conceptualization of the ways in which clothing works with and against the body to produce identities. In total, Bruzzi's analysis does more than undress cinema, it undresses psychoanalysis, clothing theories, and theories of gender and sexuality in the process. Bruzzi's strengths are the breadth of material with which she builds her theoretical framework and the relentless interrogation of the assumptions implicit in this material. Further, the films she discusses support as well as extend the theoretical frameworks she brings to bear on them. Overall, Bruzzi, in *Undressing Cinema,* convincingly demonstrates the ways in which clothing can work in film as a discourse—distinct and separate from characters and narratives.

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BOOK NOTES

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Knopf, Robert. *The Theater and Cinema of Buster Keaton.* Princeton University Press, 1999. $39.50 cloth; $14.95 paper. Early on in his book, Robert Knopf explains that he wishes to treat three questions: "What elements of vaudeville influenced Keaton's filmmaking," "How did Keaton adapt his vaudevillian skills to film," and "What elements of film attracted Keaton?" His useful new study succeeds in exploring all three issues, pulling together much current scholarship and offering a number of close readings that bring us fresh insights into Keaton's enduring comic talent. Knopf even manages some real surprises, such as the provocative parallels between Keaton's work and Hong Kong star Jackie Chan's "New Vaudeville" performance productions of the 1980s (148).

Although Knopf's work covers much familiar territory, his attention to these three questions pays off in some of the most useful readings of individual films in the Keaton oeuvre yet made. Consider his coverage of the Keaton short, "One Week" (1920), in which Keaton's honeymoon becomes a disaster as he and his new bride (Sybil Seely) strive to assemble a "do it yourself" home which a rival suitor has maliciously misnumbered. We learn that the many variations on a theme—laughs coming from the surrealistic assemblage of the house—come from a basic vaudeville formula Keaton learned early on: "transformation gags"—in which "an object, body, animal, or setting is used as if it were something else" (45). Finally, in discussing how vaudeville acts needed to end on a "wow" finish or final gag, Knopf helps us better understand Keaton's brilliant "toppers" to gag series that seem already complete in themselves before the topper.

Knopf describes Keaton's craft as "structurally fluid"; that is, Keaton was able to draw from the vaudeville aesthetic of the need to adapt and adjust to each audience and each performance, combining improvisation with tried and true material. Add the multiple possibilities brought on by using dimensions of cinema itself, and one can better understand Knopf's thesis that with Keaton, it is never "either/or" on narrative comedy vs. vaudevillian gag structure or stage vs. screen, but always a carnivalesque composite of both.

However, despite its undisputed insights, Knopf's book is a hard read overall because of the academic prose style and because Knopf wears his scholarship heavily and thus obtrusively. We often lose Keaton and his comedy in dense paragraphs and sentences, and there are far too many quotes that are often far too long when paraphrasing would have

role. Bridget, like other modern femme fatales, disrupts the assumption that women are interpretable based upon their clothing, and thus supports Bruzzi's notion that clothing in film works as a discourse capable of speaking independently of the body.

The final part of *Undressing Cinema,* "Beyond Gender," continues the interrogation of assumptions about the connections between clothing and the body by exploring correlations between gender and clothing through two forms of transvestism in film: cross-dressing and androgyny. In "The Comedy of Cross-Dressing," Bruzzi uses mainstream depictions of cross-dressing, like *Tootsie* and *Mrs Doubtfire,* to show that although cross-dressing disrupts the correspondence between the body and social appearance, in some instances wearing the clothes of the opposite sex reinforces gender codes instead of undermining them. Bruzzi contrasts these films with independent films such as *Glen or Glenda* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert,* and argues that these films restore pleasure to the practice of cross-dressing and simultaneously use clothing to examine the tensions of sexuality bypassed by their Hollywood counterparts. These representations demonstrate the ways in which clothing powerfully provides signs and clues through which the body can be read—even in opposition to its "true sex."

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Letters

To the Editor:
We write in response to Alan Rosenthal's review of our anthology, *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Film and Video*, which appeared in the Winter 1999–2000 issue of *Film Quarterly* (53:2). We are grateful to *Film Quarterly* for considering the book worthy enough to be the subject of the issue's lead review, but we also feel that your journal's readership would be better served by reviews that are somewhat more sober in their judgement and focused in their comments.

We are pleased that our humble volume could elicit such a passionate response from Mr. Rosenthal. But his vituperation seems to be about something else, and his review, apparently, gave him a convenient platform for ranting against *une certaine tendance* of contemporary criticism. As Mr. Rosenthal sees it, film criticism today is dull and academic, largely because of a postmodern conspiracy to do away with the referent in the real world, to deny the existence of absolute truth, and to reduce documentary films to texts playing with signifiers. He seems especially perturbed by the hardly radical notion that critics can find meanings in films not intended by the filmmakers themselves (although this doesn't stop him from doing the same when he smugly explains "what the editors are really saying," as he puts it—our reasons for structuring the book as we did).

Rather than to claim that documentaries have no truth at all, we intended *Documenting the Documentary* to demonstrate the richness of documentaries as texts, to show that they are in fact filled with meaning—including but not restricted to the actual historical contexts of their production. It amazes us that anyone would regard this book as an example of an invidious postmodernism seeking to drain documentary of significance.

Nevertheless, at the same time Mr. Rosenthal goes on to find too much meaning in a number of the essays, but apparently only because he disagrees with their reading. But just as one man's ceiling is another man's floor, in documentary film one man's truth (to paraphrase Richard Leacock) is another's fabrication. This is hardly a postmodern concept, and we suggest that it is Mr. Rosenthal, not the writers in *Documenting the Documentary* whom he unfairly criticizes, who lacks that "sense of inquiry, an interest in the world" that he rightly sees as fundamental to the true appreciation of documentary film.

Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski
Brock University, St. Catherine's, Ontario, Canada

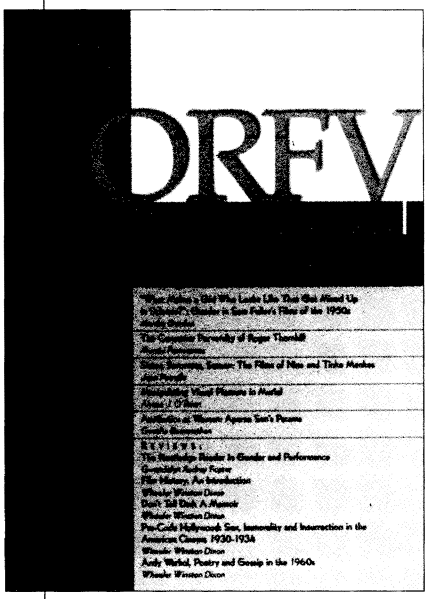
To the Editor:
In his ill-tempered review of *Documenting the Documentary,* edited by my colleagues Barry Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski, Alan Rosenthal singles out my essay on *Listen to Britain* as an example of poor "scholarship." Since he accuses me of committing "unpardonable" errors, I feel that I should draw your readers' attention to two significant errors that call Rosenthal's own research skills into question.

To begin with, I was not "brought up in an America torn apart by dissent over Vietnam." Even if I had been, I'm not sure that it would disqualify me from discussing a British film, but in fact I was born in England and lived there for more than twenty years before I moved to Canada.

Rosenthal (obviously) doesn't know me, and thus this error may be pardonable (although his unthinking assumption is hardly an example of the "good scholarship" he espouses). The second error is even more damaging. He questions my reading of the use of Elgar's music in the film's final sequence. There is, of course, no Elgar in *Listen to Britain,* and Rosenthal's discussion shows that he has confused "Land of Hope and Glory" with "Rule Britannia!" (music by Thomas Arne). I would like to point out that the muddle here is Rosenthal's, not mine, and it suggests that he is hardly qualified to take me to task for an insensitivity to British culture.

As for his assessment of my interpretation of the film, he is, of course, entitled to his own opinion. I would suggest, however, that he has misread my argument about the "People's War" by assuming that when I wrote "myth" I meant "lie" and by attributing to me the ideas of critics with whom I disagree in the essay. Perhaps I did not express myself clearly enough, but I do seem to have got through to another reviewer (British, I think!) who praised my "invaluable recovery work on Humphrey Jennings' much maligned *Listen to Britain.*"

Jim Leach
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada



Quarterly Review of Film &Video

Aims and Scope

Quarterly Review of Film and Video publishes critical, historical, and theoretical essays, book reviews, and interviews in the area of moving image studies including film, video, and digital imagery studies. Our scope is international and interdisciplinary. Contributions from diverse critical, theoretical, and historical perspectives are welcomed.

Articles Appearing in Issue 17(2)

An Interview with Pratibha Parmar, **E. Ann Kaplan**

A Few Black Keys and Maori Tattoos: Re-Reading Jane Campion's The Piano *in PostNegritude Time,* **Mark A. Reid**

Between History and Melodrama: René Clair's Quatorze Juillet **Kristine Butler**

Antonioni's The Passenger *and Identity/Identifying,* **Jack Turner**

The Spectacle of Disabled Masculinity in John Woo's "Heroic Bloodshed" Films, **Anthony Enns**

Consuming Women: The Representation of Women in the 1940 Adaptation of Pride and Prejudice, **Liora Brosh**

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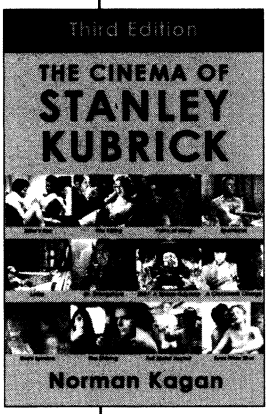

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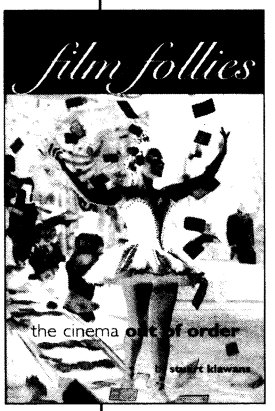

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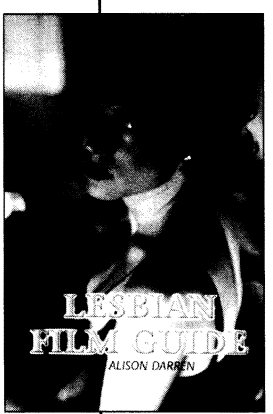

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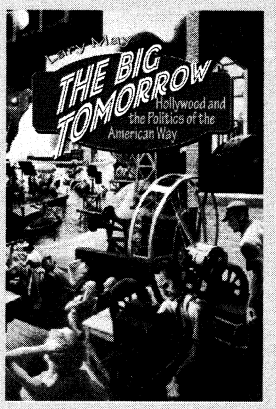

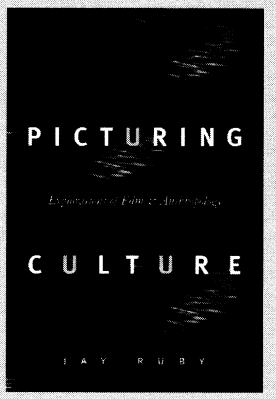

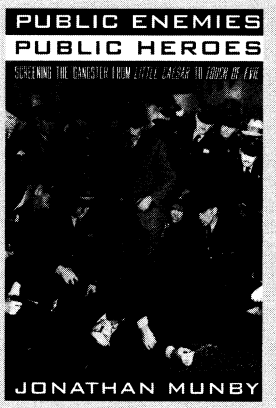

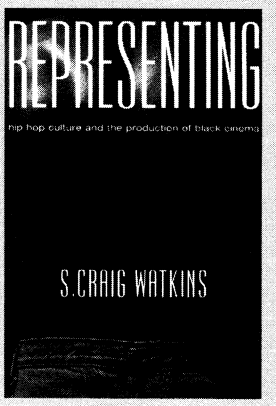

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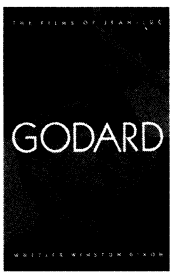

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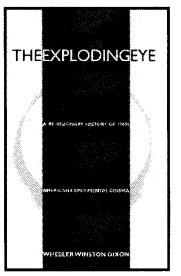

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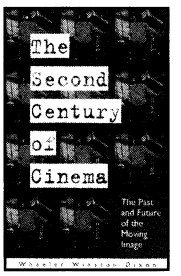

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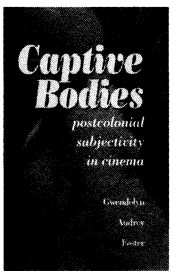

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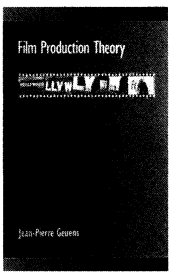

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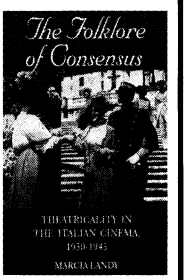

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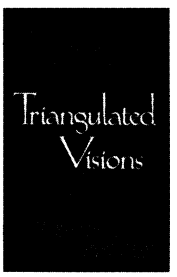

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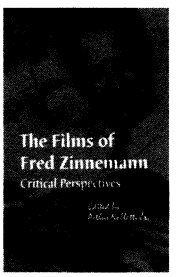

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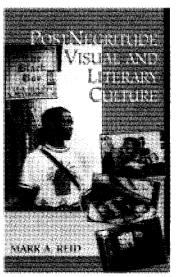

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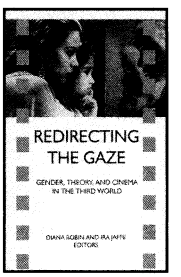

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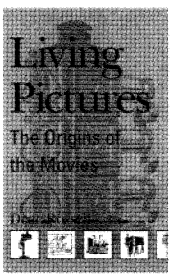

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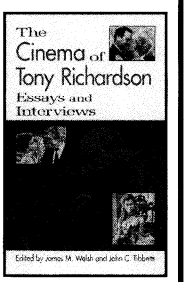

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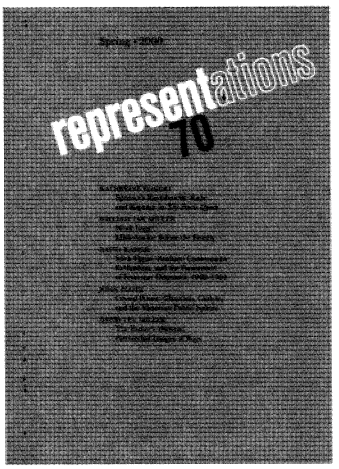

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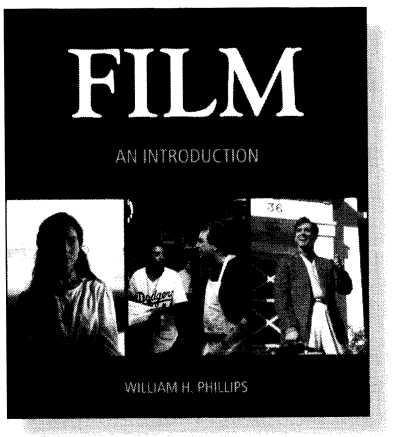

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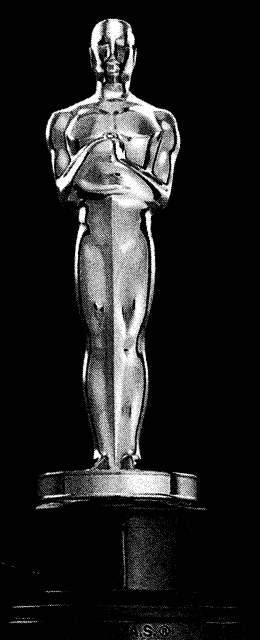

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